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HARLEQUINADE









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Constance Collier

HARLEQUINADE  
THE STORY OF MY LIFE  
*By* CONSTANCE COLLIER  
WITH A PREFACE BY NOEL COWARD  
AND TWENTY ILLUSTRATIONS

LONDON  
JOHN LANE THE BODLEY HEAD LTD.

*First published in 1929*

*Made and Printed in Great Britain by  
Tonbridge Printers, Peach Hall Works, Tonbridge*

## PREFACE

I CAN think of nobody more admirably equipped to write a book of the theatre than Constance Collier.

She is one of the few people I know who is concentrated heart and soul on her job and who has never for an instant, since those days when she used to scramble about among the grease-paint on her mother's dressing-table, wished for any laurels other than those legitimately earned in her profession, and never for a moment doubted that for her, as for all of us who belong, the theatre is the most adventurous, exciting and glamorous life in the world.

I mention this at the outset in an effort to define the integral difference of this book from the average autobiographies of celebrated actresses, which usually carry the reader hurriedly over a few highly romanticized early struggles to some ultimate peak of social serenity. Constance Collier up to the present moment appears to have been singularly lacking in that passionate yearning for social advancement which seems to animate so many of our contemporary actresses.

She admits without the suggestion of a deprecatory smirk to having passed a goodly part of her early childhood in property buckets and gutters, and she speaks unblushingly of farthing herrings and frowsy provincial lodging-houses without even that popular form of inverted snobbery which might prompt her to say: "Oh, how I should love to live those dear old days over again!"

The reality of those days has been neither dimmed nor over-sentimentalized with the passing of the years.

She has somehow invested the unemotional description of her early vicissitudes with the intangible quality of

glamour which is a fundamental part of her personality. I find it immeasurably comforting not to be asked to view an infant Constance Collier escaping from some *recherché* convent at Neuilly-sur-Seine in order to gratify her childish urge for the stage by watching the "Divine Sarah" disport herself in her prime, or to visualize her stealing away from Puritanical but kindly parents to gaze upon Ellen Terry as Ophelia—"And from that moment everything was changed for me!" I don't think anything has drastically changed for Constance Collier. She has just moved on through various failures and triumphs with a good deal of beauty and a very deep-rooted and gallant sense of humour. I met her first just before the terrible illness which brought her so very near to death, and knew her very slightly, and it quite scarifies me now to think how very nearly I came to being deprived of one of my most valued friends.

Constance Collier, as a person, possesses all the range and variety appropriate to an actress of her reputation.

I have seen her exceedingly tiresome and radiantly charming, tremendously funny and very tragic, but always, no matter through what crises she may be passing, there emanates from her a vitality and zest for life which makes her the most stimulating and entrancing of companions.

She has a whole-hearted passion for all animals which is expressed in a strange particular voice reserved exclusively for any horses, parrots, monkeys, dogs or cats which she may happen to have by her at the moment. Animated, probably subconsciously, by some queer nomadic instinct, she invariably travels her own atmosphere, consisting of silk cushions, tea-pots, hot-water bottles, books, coffee percolators and live stock, and she can be viewed placidly surrounded by all of it within half an hour of her arrival anywhere.

In London she has moments of great "eminence," when she becomes a "great lady of the theatre" and officiates in austere pompous theatrical dinners. She



delivers dignified and often flagrantly insincere speeches, which are received with the appropriate amount of reverence.

In New York this "public eminence" is less frequently demanded of her, the American theatre at present being too occupied with actual achievement to waste much time on traditional pomposities.

Constance Collier in America seems to go native more thoroughly than at home, her suite at the hotel being generally a shambles of critics, musicians, actors, producers, leading ladies, animals and tea-cups, with herself presiding from her bed, attired in a pink dressing-gown, with a Pekingese in one hand and a cigarette in the other.

She seems automatically to provide a haven for those who, tired out by the exigencies of their various jobs, turn instinctively to the relaxation of complete understanding.

I have purposely refrained from alluding to Constance Collier's work on the stage itself because the essentially personal tone of this book seems to me to demand an equally personal foreword, but I should like to say that her *Duchess of Towers* in "Peter Ibbetson" and her swift comedy acting in "Our Betters" will always remain in my memory as examples of grace and beauty and stimulating wit in the theatre. In conclusion, I am very grateful to Constance Collier for asking me to write a preface, as it gives me an opportunity to pay tribute to a very real and charming friendship.

NOEL COWARD.

NEW YORK, *February 3rd, 1929.*



## TO THE PUBLIC

I DO not know if I have anything to say that will interest you. One never can tell if one's own experiences are interesting. I do not know if you who are holding this book will find it worth finishing, or if you will fling it across the room after the first few pages. But it is always fun to look over other people's fences, into other people's boats, and I shall try to tell you my story as simply as I can. It will have no claim to literature. It is the truth, and at least it has the merit of being the life of the Theatre as I have known it.

I am not afraid of you—the Public—the Unknown. You have always been my friend, my guide, my judge. I have loved you from my babyhood. I have tried conscientiously to please you, and you, in return, have rewarded me with all that my life holds. How many times when I have stood before you in the years that have gone, trembling and hoping as I came from the wings to face you and to fling my frightened heart at your feet, you—the hundreds of you out there beyond the footlights—have merged into one great human friend. If I have merited your displeasure, you have spurred me on to better efforts. I have found the greatest happiness of my life in serving you. The men and women whose lives have crossed my own have made me suffer many times. I have loved many—and some of them have failed me. But, on the whole, I have received more kindness and love than I have deserved.

I am reserved and very shy, but to you beyond the footlights I have been able to tell the secrets of my heart, my hopes, my feelings, my ambitions. You have been

my solace and you have given me my place in the sun. You have fed and clothed me and my dear ones. You have saved me from poverty and obscurity, and I have no wish but to live and die in your service.

How egotistical all this sounds, and awfully pompous ! But I suppose I shall have to get used to talking about myself if I am to tell about my own life. Shall I ever get beyond the first chapters, I wonder ? I do not know how to write a book. I haven't any education. Some people have advised me to have my book revised and put into proper grammar ; others have said it should be left exactly as I have written it, and I prefer to do that, leaving you to be my judges and assuring you I have no pretensions whatever to literary style. I have never liked talking about myself. I like to listen to other people. The slightest detail of other people's lives arouses my immediate sympathy, but the adventures that happen to me seem commonplace, and I have passed them over lightly. For I cannot bear talking of the past even if it is an hour or two old. All that matters to me is the present and the future.

Most people do not notice this trait in me, that I am shy, as all they want in life is a good listener, and I am splendid at that. My interest in other people's joys and sorrows is quite genuine, and makes me very popular. But the contact with the heart and brain of you, the unknown, thrills me. No barriers ! No subterfuges ! No restrictions ! Only an infinite sympathy and understanding. We of the Theatre are the slaves of our imagination. That dim blackness across the footlights is the most romantic place in the world to us. Out there in the front in the darkness, on the rows of upturned faces and in the eyes that greet us, is reflected the ever-beating heart of friendship.

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# HARLEQUINADE



# HARLEQUINADE

## CHAPTER I

**T**HERE is a legend of the theatre that the fantastic monarch of our imagination, the genie of our laughter and tears, is the figure of Harlequin, masked, and holding in his hand a magic wand with which he transforms and glorifies the world.

That wand is a stick of grease-paint.

It was only when I grew up that I heard the legend, and yet as a tiny child that figure of Harlequin played quite a large part in my life. I could not have been more than four when I fell in love with him. Trippingly he came, his feet winged like Mercury. Everywhere about me there seemed to be laughter—beckoning, fairy laughter. I remember it distinctly. I have only to close my eyes, and there he is again—my Harlequin, the half-masked, mocking face, the gay, lithe figure. Quite vividly I see him—my very first love.

They say that the most faithless of us are true to our first love. This is how I first met Harlequin.

My mother had started a tour of the “fit-ups,” and that particular week we were in a little town near Bradford. I think it was in the North of England. It was Christmas time, and the pantomime in the big town near was running. It was only a tram-ride away, and my mother promised to take me to the Wednesday matinée. She could not afford to buy the tickets, and we had to chance asking the manager, so we did not know if there would be any seats to spare until the day came. My mother insisted I should rest in the morning, and, lying there in the dim

bedroom with my eyes closed, my brain worked faster than ever. I must have been a little feverish. I remember my mother could not understand why my face was so red. She was rather worried, and suggested we should put off our visit until the following Wednesday. I burst into such sobs that she dried my eyes and dressed me, and we started off together for that wonderful first pantomime.

When we got to the theatre, my mother left me standing in the corner while she went to see if she could get the seats. I was very small, and a little bewildered and frightened by the crowd. She seemed to be gone for hours. I watched the audience passing in; rich children with their parents and nurses, and large boxes of chocolates in their hands. They were laughing and chattering and going through the magic doors. How I longed to follow them and see the conductor take his place, and the musicians strike up! But there my mother stood by the box office in the queue. I saw her in the distance, moving slowly forward. At last she spoke through the opening, and then came away and stood apart, and somebody else took her place. I thought all was lost, and we should have to go home again without seeing the pantomime. I could hear the overture begin and the music striking up in the distance, and the first demon chorus, and the plans for the safety of Dick Whittington being made by the Fairy Queen in the realms beneath the sea. The pantomime had started! Then the manager came out of the box office and handed the tickets to my mother. It seemed he was an old friend. My relief was so tremendous that the tears ran down my face. The manager and my mother came towards me. She stooped and kissed me quite anxiously, and the manager patted me on the head.

"What's the matter, young woman?" he said.

I could not speak or thank him, although I wanted to thank him so much. He bent down and looked into my face and said kindly:

"Don't be afraid."

I wasn't in the least afraid. I was very grateful to him,



but I felt so strange ; the reaction was almost worse than the suspense. My mother was annoyed at my apparent shyness, as she had wished me to make a good impression on her friend.

"I don't know what's the matter with her," she said. "I am afraid the child's ill. She isn't usually shy, but she has worked herself into such a state over this pantomime I wish I hadn't brought her."

The manager evidently had children of his own, for he laughed and told me to cheer up. I tried so hard to smile, but I couldn't. My mother gave me a little shake to bring me to my senses, but I could not speak. I could not see the manager as he walked away through the mist of tears. My mother was cross, and that made it worse. She threatened to take me away unless I behaved better. I felt tired and strange, and blinked as hard as I could to try and keep the tears from dripping down the front of my best frock. I could not explain that I was crying for nothing but sheer happiness. I was too much of a baby to really understand myself, but I am sure I was delirious with happiness.

I remember very little about the pantomime. All went by in a whirl until the finale came. I woke with a start and found myself in my mother's arms. I sat very upright on her knee, ashamed of falling asleep after all the fuss I had made, but her arms were very tenderly round me, and I felt she had forgiven me. The orchestra was playing a very loud tune, and the transformation scene was on. It was a blaze of glittering glory. The background went up revealing a gigantic silver oyster-shell, out of which stepped the Fairy Queen. As she sang her song the people were getting up and putting on their hats and coats and shuffling past the seats. I stared at the stage entranced. My mother wanted to go too, as it was getting late and we had a long ride home, but I begged and begged to stay to the end, and my mother gave way to me, as she always did.

The most exciting things began to happen. Lovely girls

in tights the colour of pickled cabbage posed on water-lilies or moved across the stage; magnificent flowers slowly opened and bloomed everywhere; gauzes went up and down, and everything moved like a kaleidoscope.

Suddenly, there he was—my Harlequin! I stared at him, my round eyes wide with wonder. Gleaming, shimmering, pirouetting, smiling, tripping hither and thither, touching everything with his fairy wand. He danced into my imagination—and there he has been ever since. Tip, tap—the oyster-shell became a tree. Two quick taps on the floor—and out of a trap popped Pantaloon. A whirl, a twist—down came the sausage-shop, sausages and all, and the clown with a poker. The transformation scene was ended with all its glory. Harlequin disappeared into the wings, dancing off on his toes, sideways, with Columbine, their hands criss-cross.

It was love at first sight and for ever. All through the years I have never forgotten that first fantastic figure of the Theatre.

I wonder if our first memories are true. When do we begin really to remember? I think I remember things that happened when I was three, but I cannot be sure that somebody hasn't told me about them. I wish I could remember what happened when I was a few weeks old, for I began my adventurous life then.

My grandmother on my mother's side was Portuguese. She could hardly speak English. She was married to an Englishman who turned out badly, and she was left with a large family on her hands to bring up.

Portuguese people are incurably romantic—we are Arabs and pirates. There aren't many girls who have an Uncle Leander and an Uncle John Baptista and an Aunt Hero in their family. They were not so beautiful as their namesakes, but it shows that their parents had a sense of appreciation and infinite hope.

My grandmother's name was Madame Leopoldina Collier. She brought one of the first ballets to England—

to the Alhambra. Among her pupils were Connie Gilchrist (who was afterwards painted by Whistler in the famous "Yellow Girl" picture and became the Countess of Orkney), Kate Vaughan, and others who made equally great reputations.

All our family were dancers. I was "turned out on the bar" when I was three years old. I had a little ballet skirt, and I used to dance in my grandmother's class. My mother and her brother, my Uncle Harry Collier, started their careers as "The Child Wonders." They went to work when my mother was six, and my uncle eight, and they would be accompanied to the different music-halls by my Aunt Carolina or my Aunt Louisiana, the older members of the family. In those days they had to walk to the different music-halls, and this meant tramps of many miles a night. The children would come home exhausted. Salaries were very different in those days, but what they earned helped to keep the big family going. My mother was never very strong, and I think her constitution was undermined by the hard work of those early days.

She never developed into a great success. She was too shy and self-effacing for that, and had no belief in her capabilities. She was very tiny; so small that when I was about seventeen I used to pick her up and carry her about, much to her indignation. She was an extremely good second boy or girl in pantomime, and every Christmas I used to look forward to the pantomime days.

Mother never had the good fortune to get London engagements, and this meant years of touring. We generally played the second companies. My father, on the other hand, was an extremely clever actor. He had been well educated both in England and France, and this was unusual in the acting profession in those days. Strangely enough, he had nothing to do with the theatre and came from a non-theatrical family, and his forbears were rather Puritanical. My grandfather Hardie was a rich merchant in the City, and he disapproved very much

of his son's profession. He had expected him to go into the business. There was always a distinct undercurrent between my mother and my father's family, and I rather dreaded their visits, and the return visits to the great house in Bloomsbury were terribly awe-inspiring. I had to have very good manners, and I was frightened by the big gloomy dining-room and the tall, severe people. My father, after he had broken away from his home and burned his boats, did not like the theatrical life particularly, and after some years left the stage.

I came into being while my mother was on tour, and as she was partly responsible for the finances of the company she did not have much time to spare for me. My father could not be with us, as he had a separate engagement. I was born in lodgings on Windsor Hill, in the Royal Borough. I am glad Fate decreed that my mother should have to stay at this particular place. Somehow Windsor and the Castle and the river seemed part of me, although we only stayed there three weeks, until she was strong enough to rejoin the company. When she went to the theatre I used to be wrapped in a blanket and left among the grease-paints on the dressing-table. I have always adored the peculiar special smell of grease-paints and dressing-rooms. Perhaps that is the reason. I was so tiny that my mother could not leave me with a strange landlady, and she couldn't afford a nurse. Besides, I had to be fed between the acts. I thrived very well in spite of the tremendous difficulties of our life. The members of the company were more than kind, as they always are, and amazingly human to their comrades when anything serious has to be faced. I was adopted by them all, and, as business improved, I was regarded as their mascot.

When I got a little older I used to be left with the landlady, wherever we happened to be, with my address pinned on a card at the back of my frock in case I strayed into the street, which I loved to do. It was pinned just where I couldn't reach it, but, had I been lost, it would have been



‘THE CHILD-WONDERS’ (MY MOTHER AND MY UNCLE HARRY)





a safeguard. I was a naughty child in those days. I used, when I was so small I could hardly reach the handle of the front door except by perching on my toes, to escape into the street and play with any little ragamuffin. I would try to keep my back turned so as to hide my humiliation as long as possible. This was a great handicap to our games, and I was soon found out. When my new friends saw the card, it meant a howl of derision and jeers. If I could find sympathy among them, I would get some one to tear it off, and then I would have half an hour of enjoyment until the landlady realized I was missing and would rush out of the house, haul me out of the gutter, smack me well and put me to bed.

How I hated to go to bed! I had the midnight habit even then. The hours I spent trying to wheedle the landlady's family to let me sit up in the kitchen while my mother was at the theatre! It taught me knowledge of the world and people. If the family liked me and I could amuse them, I was allowed to sit up. If not, I was hustled off to bed the minute my mother's back was turned. And so I learned tact. It has stood me in good stead all my life. I can adapt myself to any kind of society.

My experiences in those days were varied. Sometimes the landlady's husband would be a morose gentleman who demanded silence at any cost, and I would sit like a mouse, as good as could be; and presently, thinking I was a shy child and very well-behaved, he would call me over, and I would try to find out his subject and talk him into a good mood. For this his harassed wife would take me to her heart and give me some extra delicacy for supper—fried fish and chipped potatoes from the neighbouring fish shop, or perhaps a saveloy with pease-pudding. The fish would be fried in bad oil, and Heaven knows what was in the saveloy—certainly it wasn't a diet for a child. The saveloys would come in hot, wrapped in a piece of newspaper, and the black of the printing would come off on the pease-pudding. But none of us minded. It was all delicious, and it added to the enjoyment.

I did not tell my mother of these debauches, and she would wonder why I was bilious in the morning. Sometimes the head of the landlady's family would be a jovial gentleman. He had, perhaps, called at the local public-house on his way home. He would be raucous and in unusually high spirits, suspiciously high spirits! This was my cue. I could sing and dance and keep him in the house until just before my mother got home from the theatre, when I would be scrambled into bed. I was invariably a social success in those days, the life and soul of those kitchen parties from the age of three or four.

Things were never very good for us in the matter of money and engagements, and as I grew a few years older it was a hard struggle to keep me in clothes. I was getting tall; I grew very fast. And then another form of torture was upon me. Mother would let down my frocks as far as they would go, but in spite of everything they would be above my knee, and the little frill of my white drawers would show below them. This would be the cue for the jeers of the town children, and as I went along the streets with my mother I could see them making faces and putting their tongues out at me. I did not dare to sneak out on these summer nights to play with them, because I was so ashamed of the drawers that were always in evidence—it was worse than the address on the back of my frock. This annoyed the children very much, as they thought I was “stuck up.” I would try and camouflage those dreadful drawers, and walk with my knees bent so that my skirt would hide them. But my mother, who had had me taught dancing and was a great stickler for deportment, could not understand this sudden weakness of the knees, and would insist on my standing up and walking properly. So I would be led home in disgrace, walking very upright, with the drawers showing worse than ever, amid the gibes of my acquaintances of the gutter, who would gather round the gate to watch my humiliation.

The school authorities were very insistent that travelling children should have a proper education, and as we reached

each new town Monday mornings were spent finding a school for me to go to. I never learned anything, because on Tuesdays, the first day of my official appearance in the school, I had to face the agony of being stared at by the permanent pupils and pointed out as the acting child. By Wednesday I got to know them by sight, and perhaps made a friend, but on Saturday I was taken away again to seek pastures new.

It is funny how little memories stay in one's mind. I have often tried to focus great events, wonderful views, glorious moments. I have determined never to forget them, but they have faded and can no longer be recalled. And yet—through all the years—how clearly I see a very cold schoolroom; a black stove with a long pipe going up into the ceiling, giving forth very little heat; the little shivering figure of myself sitting on a long form, nervously eyeing the strange teacher as she pointed a stern finger at the blackboard. Why should this particular incident stand out in my mind, I wonder? Yet I remember all my sensations of disgust and fear at the discipline, my red, chilled hands, my very tight boots with the vague smell of russia leather—for I was always dressed in my best on the first day of the new school. There was a sum upon the blackboard, and I was never very good at arithmetic. How I remember the titter that went round the class because I made a false calculation in my addition, the dozens of cruel eyes upon me, full of hostility and suspicion, and then my feeling of reckless defiance, the outcome of despair! I glared at the class, contempt and scorn in my eyes—like the heroine of a bad melodrama—and I think I awed them, for they left off laughing.

I did not, as I say, learn anything, because I was not concerned with history and arithmetic. It was much more important for my peace of mind for the rest of the week to get on with the class and make myself popular with the children, so that when we were let out of school I could get home with as few gibes as possible. A stage child in those days was regarded as a mysterious combination,

half devil, half angel. The children were fascinated and repelled, and if I could win them over it meant everything to me.

Nowadays children in touring companies have travelling governesses to give them certain lessons during the day, and their welfare is safeguarded. But we were too poor for any of these luxuries, and there were no laws to prevent very young children being on the stage. I tried to keep as much as I could from my mother, because she was helpless in the matter and the law demanded I should attend the school. The law was not concerned with the agony of a child's mind.

On Sundays we travelled to the different towns. My mother would have to get up at four or five in the morning to be in time for the train call. I would be put to bed fully dressed so that I could sleep until the last moment. We would often start for the station in the darkness, with the pale stars still in the sky. We would share a cab with two of the other members of the company so that our fare would be cheapened. There were anxious moments lest the cab should not turn up, or be late; and great relief and extra bustle when we heard it come rumbling over the cobbles down the empty street. Then I would be roused and my mother would carry me to the cab. I was half her size by then, and a heavy child, and she was a delicate woman.

We would start, the luggage piled up around us, while the quiet world slept. Rogues, vagabonds, off to seek another adventure as the streaky dawn began in the sky.

My mother would tuck me up on the seat of the railway carriage, and I would sleep the happy sleep of the very young. As the day wore on orange-peel, beer-bottles, broken sandwiches and dirty newspapers would pile up around us. The trains were very slow and stopped at every station, and the ladies of the company would jump out, full of animation, to greet another company in the different trains we met. They invariably forgot their hats, and as there had not been much time to lavish on



their toilets they looked very sordid in the early morning light. But they were gay and light-hearted. If we were lucky enough to find a refreshment-room open the entire company would, with one accord, make a dead set for it, and the sandwiches and buns and ginger-beer and cups of tea would disappear with the most amazing rapidity, as if the locusts had passed over them. It didn't seem to matter how many meals they had had before; the fact that there was a refreshment-room was sufficient. As the day wore on the company would become more hilarious, squabbling and joking over their cards. Their salaries were very small, but they always managed to bring me packets of sweets and little presents, and helped my mother to entertain me on those journeys. Those dear, dear people and their kindnesses to me I shall never forget.

I was smuggled on these occasions. We hadn't enough money to pay my extra fare, and so when the guard came for the tickets my mother would get a friend to sit opposite her. They would spread a rug over their knees and appear to be deeply interested in conversation. Underneath the rug I would be with my little fox-terrier, Nellie. I used to hold her nose in case she should bark. Sometimes the guard would take a long time because he was entranced by the joviality of the company, and it made a break in his long, dull day. Besides, the comedian always had a joke to crack, and underneath the rug Nellie and I would nearly smother.

One terrible day the guard opened the door on the wrong side of the carriage, and Nellie and I fell on him. But he was a kindly man, and smiled at me, and did not say anything about it. But I was worried for hours in case the entire police force should be waiting to arrest me at the end of the journey. I always had great fear and respect for policemen—I suppose because in my street games with the local children they used to come and move us on, and we children would fly in every direction.

Nellie was my great companion in those days, and I

told her all my secrets. We used to be left waiting on the luggage in some damp railway station while my mother searched for rooms. When the station emptied the lights would be turned down, and there we would sit—for hours sometimes under the dim lamp. If I fell asleep Nellie would keep guard. It seemed no hardship because it was our usual life. It is only when we get out of the routine and look back that we see any hardship in our past.

Then, when the lodgings were found, my mother would come and fetch me, and we would have a meal from the landlady's Sunday dinner—a cut from the half-cold mutton, floating in grease, watery greens. There was a skimpy fire and a gloomy gas-jet, showing a faint glow over our dreary little meal. But it was the height of luxury to me—the end of the journey.

Theatrical lodgings were all alike—with enlargements of the landlady's family hanging on the wall, very stare-eyed and stiff, and photographs of pantomime stars with elaborate inscriptions of deepest affection, generally beginning: "To Ma—with all my fondest love." I often wondered why all the landladies were called "Ma," and why every actress who stayed with them seemed to adore them so.

I hated bedtime in the new lodgings. There were always dark passages and a staircase with very steep stairs for me to stumble up. I used every subterfuge to stay in the conversation, with my eyes dropping with sleep, rather than make that everlasting journey from the warm sitting-room into the great beyond. But the awful moment came, and I had to be put away in the far-off bedroom.

There were great distinctions in the lodgings in those days. If you were the star or the leading lady you had the drawing-room floor, with bedroom adjoining, and were waited on first. If you were second lead you had the parlour floor. We never achieved this magnificence. We had a back sitting-room, with the bedroom at the top of the house. And so I was banished, a very frightened child, to a strange, cold little room, generally with broken



NELLIE AND I





venetian blinds, through which the moon, if there was a moon, sent a friendly ray. I would steal to the door and listen with my ear pressed to the keyhole, shivering and frightened, until I heard my mother's footsteps coming up to bed.

How I admired and envied the drawing-room floors in those days, and longed for the time when my mother and I could be called "The Firsts" !

## CHAPTER II

MY mother was a very good clog dancer and also, as I said, an excellent second pantomime boy, and the Christmas pantomimes were the times I liked best. Every year my mother seemed to be playing Dandini, the Prince's friend in "Cinderella." They were marvellous and jolly times—the beginnings of the pantomime rehearsals, the hard work and the gaiety of it all, the crackers and snap-dragon on Christmas Eve and the Christmas tree, to which the company would contribute the presents. And sitting up and seeing the New Year in was a stern business too, and a great event in my life. We would have the window wide open and wait, freezing, for the bells, and then—when the first chime came—drink the health of the New Year in a glass of ginger wine. I think Mother and Father had port, but it was supposed to be the same.

I was very conceited and proud, and gave myself magnificent airs with the children of the town, if my mother was acting in the pantomime. The minute they knew that she was such a distinguished person they treated me with the greatest deference in our games. I could do anything I wanted. Being in the pantomime seemed different from being in an ordinary play. We had marvellous pantomimes of our own, in which I played most of the parts. These performances generally took place in the landlady's backyard, if she would put up with it. Cold as the weather was it never deterred us; and, if there was snow, so much the better. Our warm excited hearts protected us.

My mother played with Ernest Milton's company a good deal, and Milton Rosmer, his son, now one of the most distin-

guished London actors, was my co-star in many of these performances. We would write our plays, produce them, and act them. We could not afford to go to dramatic schools, but our performances were quite as good for us as the training of repertory theatres, and very useful experience for our future careers. It taught us not to be self-conscious. We learned how to make up, and with a sword, a crown and a bit of drapery, borrowed from the pantomime wardrobe, we could play anything—from Shakespeare to the Demon King.

I got quite familiar with Harlequin in those days, but ever for me he held a special glamour. My greatest treat was to watch the harlequinade, and to see him come dancing on. Off the stage he meant nothing—perhaps an elderly man who, to eke out his small salary, helped with the baggage—but the moment he held his wand and wore his sparkling dress and the little half mask he was my God of Romance!

How terrible were the last nights of the breaking up of the pantomimes; everybody kissed each other; everybody cried and laughed and vowed eternal friendship—all heartfelt, and entirely sincere at the time.

But the theatre is a place of brief friendships and eternal farewells. Alas, I am afraid we arouse much deeper feelings of friendship than we are capable of returning. That is, I think, because we learn to safeguard ourselves. Behind our consciousness is the knowledge that soon we shall be on the wing again—across strange seas to new countries, new people, resting for a brief while, charmed and interested for the moment; then off away again, without much regret.

When I was very young this seemed to me a terrible thing. I used to try so hard to regret and remember, but, in spite of it all, I found myself enjoying new people, fresh rehearsals, strange towns, new interests.

But often, in spite of all the glamour, when I was a child, I longed for some definite spot that we could call

our own, a place that other children seemed to take for granted—a place called “home.” I dreaded the end of the tours of the pantomimes and the search for strange cheap lodgings, the nights when my mother had nothing to do, the strained preoccupation on her face until the new engagement was settled and the spring tours began. And since I have grown up I have never got over that “lodging” feeling, that restlessness, that sense of flight.

I have lived in nearly every foreign capital, acted in a great many, met all sorts of people. Sometimes I have lived on very little money, and at other times in great luxury. But money, or the lack of it, has, curiously enough, very little significance for me, although, as a child, it was the bogey of my existence.

But I wish I could settle. If I could only eliminate the *Wanderlust* in me—the longings for change and excitement, the sense of a bird ready for flight. I remember a dear old Catholic priest saying to me once, “Give me a child up to the age of ten and do what you like with him after. He will always be a Catholic.” I knew what he meant—the things we learn when we are very young stay with us for ever. It is as if this restlessness had been blown into me, as the Venetians blow their lovely designs into glass.

But I wouldn't change the actor's life for any other in the world. These last few paragraphs that I have written seem to give the impression that I am unhappy, that I am lonely. It isn't in the least true. It is only the artist in me that makes me look sometimes with envy at the Philistine and his settled life, and give way a little to one of the worst faults in human nature—self-pity. For I am the true child of the Kingdom of Make-Believe, and deep in my heart I wouldn't be anything else. We of the theatre have a charmed life! We are the friends of kings and beggars, fairies and poets! We are the citizens of the whole wide world, and we are children for ever!

Mother and I were very much alone. It was hard for my parents to see much of each other because they had to be in different companies, and so they would be parted for months at a time—the salary for a joint engagement was so small. My father was rather a far-away person to me when I was a child, and I did not know him very well until I became older. There had been one or two glorious Christmases when we had all three been together, when my mother played Red Riding Hood and my father the Wolf in the pantomime—but, alas, those happy times were very rare.

Although I dreaded the ends of the tours and the pantomimes so much, there were two things that reconciled me to London—my Aunt Lousiana and the visits to the agents. I always had her wardrobe room to look forward to. There would be a subtle glow in my heart, even when I was in floods of tears, on the last night with the good-byes to the company. I was ashamed of this secret feeling. I could stand outside myself, even as a child, and know that my tears and sorrow at parting were not quite genuine, and would not last very long.

I always loved spangles and tarlatan. My mother's eldest sister, my Aunt Lousiana, was wardrobe-mistress for many years at Drury Lane Theatre. She seemed to me a magic person when I was a very little girl—I loved her very dearly, but she died long ago. She was rather fat and elderly, but to me extremely beautiful, in fact, my ideal of the queen of the fairies! I suppose my first fairy queen must have been middle-aged and—as first impressions always remain—I have a sense of disappointment to this day whenever the fairy queen is played by a young girl.

My aunt was very fond of me, and my greatest treat was to go into the wardrobe room, where there were many girls under her, and sit on the floor at her feet among the clippings and little bits of stuff that fell from the work-girls' tables. My mother swore I ate the spangles. If there was a bit of tarlatan left over, and no longer of any



use, my aunt would make me a little fancy dress or a ballet skirt, and I would dance and act in it, or be allowed to go down to my grandmother's classes and see the ballet girls having their lessons, and, as a great treat, take a lesson with them, dressed as they were, in my little ballet dress, taking myself and my lesson as seriously as they did.

My mother was a magic person—she was always laughing. In our poorest days she managed to buy a bunch of flowers. Wallflowers she loved best, brown and golden, and after all these years I cannot pass them by—they seem like a little smile from her. If our meal was meagre she would be gay and debonair, and make me laugh so much, and tell me such lovely stories that I could forget I was hungry. She had a marvellous sense of humour which helped us through our hardest times. Sometimes we only had a shilling to carry us through the whole day, get meals for us both, and pay our half-way fares to the agents. We always made a great adventure of the shilling. We used to put it on the table between us, and look at it, and think over the best way to lay it out, and how far we could make it go. The great thing was to keep it a shilling as long as possible because, as soon as it was changed and something taken out of it, it would only be elevenpence halfpennyworth of dull heavy coppers, unless we were lucky enough to get a sixpence and a threepenny-bit, but they weren't half so beautiful as the shining, silver shilling. Then I would take my mother's hand and go with her into the Lambeth Road or along by the "Elephant and Castle," with the shilling secure in my mother's little black purse, and if I was very good I was allowed to hold the purse; and this was a great responsibility. Along by the stalls, with their vegetables and meat and fish, we would go, and choose the cheapest food, and the stall-holders would let us pick out our favourite bits. And then we would have to give up the shilling. This was always part of the game with my mother and me. I would keep it as long as I possibly





MY MOTHER



could before putting it into the shopkeeper's hand, and then I would look at my mother and sigh, and she would look woebegone, and then our change would come, and our parcel, and we would brighten up and go home, laughing, to cook our meal quite contentedly.

The stall-holders knew us quite well, and would sometimes give me an apple or an orange. How beautiful it all seemed—the flaring lights of the oil lamps over the stalls, the neat little plates of mussels and shrimps and whelks, all set on a clean white oilcloth with a bottle of vinegar beside them. How tempting they looked! The lovely fruit, the great slabs of fish and the flower-stalls were enchanting to me!

Ah, how beautiful were those Lambeth barrows of my babyhood! If a great artist could have painted them. The dim muddy streets on a November night, with the mist, or perhaps fog, the golden lights of the barrows, and those great flares gleaming through the darkness.

I loved the cheery calls of the vendors. Most of them had an animal of some sort attached to the stall—an old dog, of no particular breed, or a puppy; and one stall had a parrot that used to join in the cries of the street and was quite as good at selling the wares as was his master.

We always lived in Kennington, or Lambeth, or Holloway, because they were the cheapest places to get lodgings. In the mornings we went across Waterloo Bridge to the agents. Ah, the wonderful stories my mother told me on those walks—all the romance of the theatre. We were in direst poverty, but it didn't seem to matter. If my mother was out of work it meant a daily pilgrimage, and as we simply could not afford the fares each way we would start off hand in hand. It meant a good hour and a half's tramp right along the dreary Caledonian Road, past King's Cross and on to the West End, if we were living in Holloway; or past the "Elephant and Castle" and on over the Bridge if we were in Lambeth or Kennington. My mother would tell me tales all the way, and the drab road

would be full of enchantment. We would take our lunch with us, a quarter of a pound of cooked bacon or beef, made into thick sandwiches, and the time would pass like magic—for me, at least. But my mother used to be tired and worn out by the time we arrived.

All the agents seemed to have the same formula. There was the office boy, surrounded by a low rail which kept him from the common herd. There was the door behind him, at which everybody looked eagerly in case it opened and the great one—the agent himself—came out. There were dozens of girls, *passée* women, old and young men, their clothes shabby, and a pathetic look of brushed-upness about them, as if they'd tried to make a special effort to look smart. Perhaps a girl would have a bit of ribbon tied round her neck, or a new flower pinned on her faded hat.

I loved the excitement of going to the agents, tramping up the narrow stairs. I even loved the indifferent office boy reading his comic paper, and the lovely photographs of bygone stars, with enormous hips, in tights and swans-down-trimmed boots. Very faded, fly-blown pictures they were, and they had stood on the mantelpiece or hung on the walls for years. Most of the originals were dead or in charitable institutions, and some of them were happy grandmothers. But there they were, jauntily flaunting their youth in the most gallant attitudes. I loved them all!

The office boy would generally say, without looking up from his paper, "Nothing doing—Guv'nor's away," and we would turn and tramp down the stairs again, and up the street to the next agent's. Perhaps the same thing; and my mother's face would be anxious and tired, but her spirit was always the same, and I'd trip along beside her, gay as a lark. It was great fun for me. Then a day would come when everybody was very bustling and alert at the agent's. "You'd better wait—they're casting a show for So-and-so." My mother's face would glow, and her eyes sparkle, and we would sit down by the wall in the corner

if we could find a place, for on casting days the offices were crowded with men and women as pathetic and anxious as we were. And the cruel sun, if there happened to be any, would creep in through the windows and show up the poor, shabby, eager crowd!

We sometimes had to wait for hours and hours, but there was lots going on, and most amusing people to watch, most of them boasting about their past triumphs. The actor's ego is his saving grace, and helps him through so many trials. When lunch time came we took out our packet of sandwiches—my mother was a confirmed optimist: like Mr. Micawber, she always thought something would turn up—and we would sit there, perhaps from ten o'clock in the morning till the late afternoon, and then be told by the casual youth with the comic paper that Mr. B. had been gone some time and the play was cast.

Then home—two threehalfpenny fares, and a tramp at the other end—and our room, fireless and dark, and the paraffin lamp to light, and a fire to make, and I would put the kettle on and get my mother a cup of tea, and take her hat and mantle, and put my arms round her little, tired, dispirited body and try to comfort her. Sometimes there was a tear in her eye though she'd be smiling all the time, and if I accused her of it she'd deny it strenuously and do a little step-dance round the room to make me laugh and to prove how gay she was.

But the turn of the tide always came. It was amazing. Just when we were down to our last little bit of money Mother would settle an engagement. Tip tap. Harlequin's wand. The scene changed. We'd leave dreary old London with the paraffin lamp behind us, and there would be blue days in Devonshire. They always seemed to be blue—the days in Devonshire—with the primroses in the spring and the larks singing, and as the summer wore on the long tramps in the country. I can remember so distinctly a field with poppies in it, and huge king-puffs and daisies, and little blue butterflies flitting about, and

my mother sitting on the grass with the inevitable lunch spread out—cold bacon sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs, so thrilling to crack. Then, back to our lodgings again with our arms full of flowers, and lovely teas with Devonshire cream and jam, and our little sitting-room glorified with the trophies of the field. I loved to arrange the flowers, but as they were picked in the sun their pretty heads soon drooped dejectedly over the landlady's tin pail or the water-jug that was borrowed for the occasion.

The contrast of the different cities was amazing. I can remember our rooms in Scotland, and the little town we used to visit, with the grey granite and stone houses, very cold and austere, and how I liked to be tucked in my little warm bed in the wall. I can see a picture now of my mother bending over me for a last kiss before she went off to the theatre, and the gas-light shining through her black hair, turning it nearly red. I sat up and put my arms round her, and told her how lovely she was. I thought her the most beautiful person in the world.

To this day I love touring almost better than playing in London, possibly because of those times, or it may be that we—my whole family—are gipsies, rogues, vagabonds of the road!

Awkward things happened too, and I learned some lessons that have lasted me through life. One day a member of the company said to my mother, "What eyes the child has—they'll do some damage one day." I could not quite understand what he meant, but I practised using my eyes after that. I made terrible grimaces if I met anybody—practising using my eyes. My mother was astonished. She couldn't understand at all what I was doing. Some one would give me a kiss or a pat on the head, and I would make a dreadful face by way of allurements. At last my mother found out what it meant, and my first attempts at being a "vamp" were nipped in the bud and ended in floods of tears! I have played many vamps on the stage since, but I have not used the eye method.



### CHAPTER III

**M**Y life about this time was overcast by the tragedy of so many lives. My grandfather had spoiled the prospects of his whole family with drink, and my father, who was the most sensitive of men, and I think because of that, began to drink too. He longed to be with us, as we wanted to be with him. The life of the theatre is so lonely, and often very disappointing, especially for a man. My father was ambitious and a fine actor, but he never got a real chance. It is a very different thing to play in London and live a more or less normal life with your family. The everlasting change of the travelling actor, the cheap lodgings and long days of idleness, are very demoralizing. Now, it is different, and there are many outlets. Actors who travel play golf and tennis, but this was never dreamed of when I travelled with my parents in the "fit-ups."

It is curious that so many poets and actors and men of genius and extreme sensibility have taken to this seeming solace—drink. I suppose it is because it shuts out the sordidness of life for a while. But, alas, it creates a vicious circle, and in the end reacts physically and mentally. My father, who was the gentlest of men, loved my mother and me dearly, but that could not save him from developing this weakness. He was full of remorse afterwards, but he had lost the power of resistance. We did everything possible to stop him, but without avail. He tried his best when he was with us, but, alas, we had to be parted so often. I remember I used to sit bolt upright in my bed in the dark room, listening, at the time that my father and my mother came home from the theatre, if they happened to be acting together, and I could tell by my father's



footsteps if things were all right. In that case I would fall back asleep instantly. It was almost as if this action were automatic and I hadn't wakened at all. But if I heard a fumbling with the key, an ominous stumbling on the stairs, I sprang out of bed to meet them. I can see myself now waiting at the top of the stairs in my little white night-dress. My presence seemed to calm my father.

I say all these things because his recovery was so miraculous, and shows that drinking is a mental attitude. All our love could not stop him, but one day, when we had been reduced to poverty and despair through the tragedy of it, he went into a little church to sit down and rest—he had always had the deepest feeling for religion—and heard a sermon by a quite ordinary, rather uninspired parson. All that my mother and I had tried to do for him, all our anguish, all our unavailing sorrow, had been in vain. What that wonderful preacher said I shall never know—but my father gave up drink from that day.

I never knew that man, but whoever he was he did his life's work. He saved a soul!

Then our lives began to change. My father from that time on was strictly religious, the dearest of fathers, but a little stern. My Sundays, if we were in London, had to be spent at service. He would take me to church in the morning, insist on my attending the Sunday-school class in the afternoon and the evening service at night. That was an ordeal for me, as I had not had much discipline in religious observances. We had travelled so much that there was no time for church-going, although my mother was a profound believer. But how I dreaded the London Sunday!

I could not understand or hear half the service, and looked forward with horror to the curate's declamation of his chapter from the Bible, called the Lesson. It was so dull, so without imagination, and the beautiful words were intoned in such an unnatural way that I got a hatred of the Bible. It was only when I grew up and went back to it again that I realized its magnificence and profound

beauty. I have always wondered why that curious intonation is traditional in the Church. I could not bear kneeling, and I am sure that to have religion forced upon one so that it becomes a dreadful duty is the wrong way for children to be taught the understanding of God. And I was very thankful when my father and mother got a joint engagement and I could have the Sunday railway journeys again.

About this time "The Silver King" was being played in London. My father and mother took an engagement together in the touring company, and I was to play one of the children. I was very earnest and self-important, and, I am ashamed to say, overacted so grossly in the most serious scene, where the little girls were let out of school, that I made the audience laugh and was taken out of the part at once. All that I have suffered since in the way of disappointment does not compare with that early defeat. I thought I should never get over the degradation and the complacent smiles of the other children on the Sunday journeys.

However, I must have had something in me even in those days, because the stage manager took me in hand, and after he had coached me for two or three weeks I was allowed to play the part of Cissie, as the little girl who had been engaged was too tall. It was the most important child's part in the play. I remember hearing the stage manager say to my mother, "She has personality." I was not very bad as Cissie, neither was I very good. But I had all the emotions of a leading lady and took myself very seriously. That word "personality" stuck in my mind, and later I have grown to realize that it was the greatest compliment that could be paid to me, as it is the first ingredient in an actress's career.

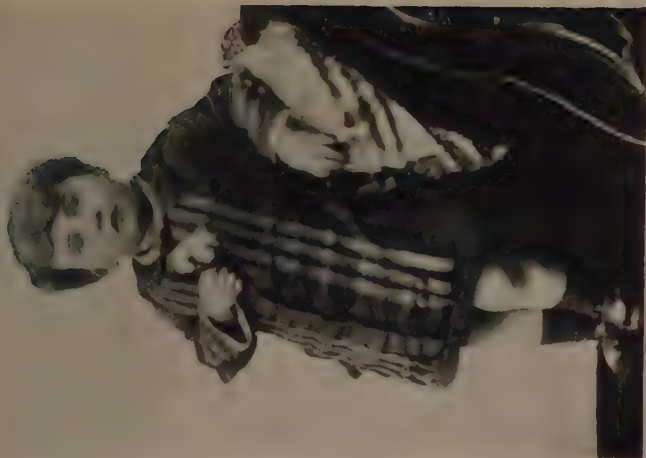
Once more the magic tip, tap. A complete transformation scene. After the engagement in "The Silver King" my mother decided I should have to leave the theatre altogether and begin my serious education. So a little

cheap boarding-school was found for me. We could not afford very much. Never shall I forget our first parting or my mother's face as she left me alone in that dismal drawing-room where I was to become a boarder. The effusively-kind governess held my hand with a grip so firm that it was painful. I was to find out later, to my cost, it was the iron hand indeed.

That boarding-school was the most awful experience of my childhood. I suppose the proprietress was very poor, and the few boarders she had did not pay her. She was intensely religious and extremely mean. We children hardly had enough to eat. Even in the poorest days with my mother I never endured the gnawing pangs of hunger that I experienced during the school classes. We had to go for incredibly long walks in our thin uniform dresses and sailor hats. We wore our hair in tight pigtails. I hated to plait my lovely, dark, curly hair that my mother was so proud of. I hated the hard sailor hats that made a dent in my forehead. I hated the elastic under my chin, but I hated most of all the pinched faces and the red noses of the other girls. I felt like a convict as we got into step and formed the young ladies' crocodile for our daily promenades. A gaunt spinster, the assistant governess, walked beside us to keep us in order. This was unnecessary, because we were so dispirited and depressed as we tramped along we hadn't the energy to rebel! There were about thirty girls, as some of the day pupils joined in the walks, so the crocodile was a long one, and the leading couple sometimes had a chance to smuggle a few sweets. The woman who kept the little general and sweet shop at the end of the street had great sympathy for us, and if we had a penny ready, and had the luck to be in the first two or three couples, and the governess should happen to be in the rear, we would go home triumphant with a packet of pear-drops. We didn't get many for a penny, and as our parents were too poor to give us much pockey money each girl would stand treat in turn,



WHEN I PLAYED IN 'THE SILVER KING'



WHEN I PLAYED MY FIRST SPEAKING PART



and the two ounces of pear-drops would be saved for the night's debauch, to be divided among all of us.

I was the youngest boarder, although there were many day pupils younger than myself. We slept in a long, cold dormitory—at least we never slept, for the minute the lights were put out that was the sign for the girls to get out of their beds and romp and talk half through the night. I was a theatre child, and if I didn't wake up and tell them stories of the theatre, and recite to them, they used to pull the bedclothes off me and leave me shivering. There was generally a spy about—either the head mistress or an assistant governess—who would creep up the stairs with her hand over the candle and pounce into the room in the midst of these revelries. The other girls managed to scamper to their beds, and as all of them had been round me, forcing me to act or sing, my voice was the one voice heard amid the laughter and whispers, and consequently I was the one that came in for most punishment. I was considered the ringleader.

I think the head mistress was secretly glad to have an opportunity to punish me. Her religion and teachings were so narrow that she thought the theatre a direct temptation of the Devil, and anyone belonging to it bound for hell. It was her proud boast that she had never entered a theatre in her life. I could not explain the situation to her because it meant giving away the other girls. There was nothing noble or heroic about my attitude. I would willingly have given them away, but had I done so they would have been revenged in the dormitory. I was utterly tired out, and almost a nervous wreck. We had to get up in the morning and wash in cold water—sometimes break the ice in the water jug; such a thing as hot water was unheard of—and be downstairs by seven o'clock, shivering and hungry, for prayers! Breakfast—slabs of bread with hardly any butter, washy, half-cold tea—and then the class.

Oh, the misery of my life at that time! I had been used to affection and the company of grown-up people.



I did not understand those rampageous girls. I did not understand the cruelty of the head mistress, under the guise of religion. I was constantly hungry, and I wasn't clever at school lessons. I was a theatre child—an alien. Whenever there was a sneer it was directed at me and the ways of the theatre generally. The Victorians despised the theatre, although they had an envious eye on it. They seemed to think an actress's life consisted exclusively of oysters and champagne and huge earnings. They couldn't have believed, and I couldn't have explained to them, our struggles to keep our heads above water, and the difficulty we had to make both ends meet. They never thought there was such a thing as work in connection with the theatre. It seemed to them just a place of frivolity and immorality. How immensely the attitude towards the theatre has changed since those days! It is incredible!

At the end of her tour my mother came to see me at the school. I had lately been giving way to fits of crying, much to the annoyance of the head mistress. Hysteria she called it. I remember her, outside the drawing-room door, gripping my hand with the old firm grip and giving me a little shake, and telling me to smile as I went in to see my mother. How entirely that genteel lady's attitude and manner and personality changed as we went through the door! The cruel tyrant of the past months became the affable, sweet-mannered elderly spinster whose love for little children was phenomenal. She bent down and patted me on the head and kissed me to make my mother see how fond she was of me, and I stood there with a mechanical grin on my face, too terrified to leave off smiling.

My mother noticed that I looked thinner, but the affable one explained I was growing. When my mother said good-bye to me the whole world went black. I felt I should never see her again, I should die if she left me. A sudden impulse seized me. I broke away from the governess—I burned my boats! I rushed to my mother



and, in a torrent of words and tears, told her of my hunger and loneliness and the cruel treatment I had suffered. She was astounded, as I had seemed so happy and content a moment before. The head mistress never ceased to smile, but there was a glint in her eye, and I guessed what was in store for me when my mother left the house.

She explained that children were often hysterical when they saw their parents, and the best discipline in the world was to leave them at school. I knew our financial difficulties, and that mother had scraped up the money to pay for my term, and that it had just begun again, and she had paid. I felt I was lost; the woman made her explanation of my breakdown so plausible. My mother listened calmly to the head mistress's explanation of the strange idiosyncrasies of children. The governess took my hand, and I felt myself being drawn away by that iron grip—back—back to the horror of the past months, the lack of sympathy, the cruelty and suffering in the name of gentle Jesus. I could not say any more. I could not speak. My mother looked at me, and then she looked at the governess, and there must have been something in my face, for she said very calmly:

“Do you mind letting some one bring down her coat and hat, as I am taking her with me now.”

The head mistress was outraged. Such a thing had never happened in her school before. How could it be explained to the other pupils?

My mother was calm and insistent, and I clung to her in my agony of mind lest some means should be found to part us at the last minute. The head mistress pleaded I should be left for another day at least to say good-bye to my companions and let her present me with a little prize she had been saving for me—a consolation prize. Besides, my luggage was not packed—my school books, etc. My mother said all could be sent on, and she gave my hand a little squeeze.

Then the head mistress dropped her manner of gentility and began to abuse play actors and deplore her mistake in allowing her school to be smirched by the advent of a child of the theatre. Her mind was cruel and narrow, and her eyes were full of hatred as she looked at me. My mother looked so small and gentle that I thought she would never have the courage to fight her and we should never get out of the house; but she stuck to her point with great determination, and at last we escaped—the door of that prison opened and closed on us—and we stood outside on the pavement together and laughed and looked at each other and started on our vagabond way again.

That was my only attempt at formal education. After that the theatre was my schoolroom, and life was my teacher. I am sure it is the best apprenticeship for the stage. Ordinary education teaches one suppression and self-consciousness. One has to grow backwards, out of these things, before one can become an actress. My only regret for my lack of education is that I have never known foreign languages, and hard as I have tried since I have been grown up it has been impossible to get a true grip of them—childhood is the only time. Every child should be taught them. A knowledge of languages is the master key to the whole world.

Mother gave me a Shakespeare about this time, and I began to learn the plays. No one ever told me he was academic and difficult to understand, and so I found him, going to him with an open mind—a child's mind—easy and simple and human. We are apt to be persuaded by the intellectual gentlemen who explain him to us from the study that he is involved and full of intricate and complicated meanings. But Shakespeare is first of the theatre, and secondly of the study—he belongs to the actor, he wrote his plays for actors and, best of all, he was an actor too. Through the years as they have gone by I have found no situation that Shakespeare did not fully understand beforehand, and with my spiritual

growth and my wider knowledge of life my appreciation of his genius is humbler and deeper. It is exactly as if the Immortal Hand had drawn back the great veil and shown him the whole world and all humanity in one broad, sweeping glance.

I think the secret of Shakespeare's universal appeal, to the ragged urchin in the street and the king in his palace, is his extraordinary humanity. He believes in life; he is full of hope. Most philosophers despise life, but Shakespeare teaches his followers the way to live, fills them with inspiration and equips them for the fight. He is like radium or sunlight. He is constructive, not destructive. Shakespeare saw three hundred years ago, everything that could happen to our modern life and everything that had happened in the past.

I am glad I got my knowledge of Shakespeare out of the theatre, and not from the study. I learned to appreciate him, not only to reverence him. Kneeling is such an uncomfortable attitude that one is apt to get up and walk away. There is too much reverence for beautiful things in art, and not enough love.

## CHAPTER IV

THE first part I studied, when I was about ten or eleven years old, was Lady Macbeth! There was a green in front of the theatre of Leamington where my mother was playing. On the grass was a big cannon, and I would sit there and wait for my mother's rehearsals to be over, learning, and perhaps declaiming Shakespeare to the children who were playing on the grass. They were a bit astonished, I must say, and so were the nurse-maids, but they liked it—it made a change. I depended very much on these casual acquaintances for my audience—and I had to have an audience, even as a little girl. I would act to the children in their perambulators. I am afraid the nurse-maids didn't appreciate my tragedy, and would roar with laughter. Anyway, I was a great success, and Mother would find me surrounded. I don't think she minded, as she was a tremendous student of the classic school, and was delighted that I appreciated it too. As a little girl she had appeared in all the children's parts at Sadler's Wells with Samuel Phelps. I insert this little playbill of her appearance in "Macbeth" with Mr. Phelps and Miss Helen Forsyth as Lady Macbeth.

Mr. Phelps was exceedingly kind to the little girl of eight or nine, and he was her hero. He must have had a most magnetic personality, with a deep and beautiful bass voice. My mother seemed to understand him and never feared him, although he was awe-inspiring to the rest of the company. She hung on every word he uttered, with round and amazed eyes, and so got an early and almost too intimate knowledge of Shakespeare. She was

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*On Thursday and Saturday, November 3rd and 5th, 1864,*

The Performances will commence with the Farce of

## TOO MUCH FOR GOOD NATURE.

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After which, Each Evening, commencing at Eight o'clock, produced on a scale of great completeness, combining in the representation all the Characters, Supernatural Agents, Choruses, Musical and Scenical Illusions, SHAKESPEARE'S Tragedy of

## MACBETH.

The Scenery by MR. WILLIAM BEVERLEY.

Duncan (King of Scotland) ... ..	MR. J. NEVILLE
Malcolm } his Sons ... ..	{ MR. G. F. NEVILLE
Donalbain } ... ..	{ MR. WEAVER
Macbeth } Generals of the King's Army ... ..	{ MR. PHELPS
Banquo } ... ..	{ MR. A. RAYNER
Macduff } ... ..	{ MR. CRESWICK
Lennox } Noblemen of Scotland ... ..	{ MR. WARDE
Rosse } ... ..	{ MR. H. SINCLAIR
Fleance (Son to Banquo) ... ..	MISS COLLIER
Siward { Earl of Northumberland, General of the English Forces	{ MR. FITZJAMES
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First Officer ... MR. BEDFORD	Second Officer ... MR. GLYNDON
First Witch ... MR. G. BELMORE	Second Witch ... MR. EDMUND PHELPS
Third Witch ... MR. ROBERT ROXBY	Hecate ... MR. BARTLEMAN
First Singing Witch ... ..	MISS REBECCA ISAACS
Second Singing Witch ... ..	MISS EMMA HEYWOOD
Third Singing Witch ... ..	MR. MARLER
Fourth Singing Witch ... ..	MR. MATHIESON
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Genilewoman ... ..	MISS GREEN

Previous to the Tragedy, the Orchestra will play L. SPOHR'S Overture to *Macbeth*.

Musical Director, MR. J. BARNARD. Ballet Master, MR. J. CORMACK.  
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 Gas Appointments, MR. J. HINKLEY.

WHEN MY MOTHER WAS EIGHT YEARS OLD





very young, and Samuel Phelps's magnificent voice (which was a natural gift) was her idea of how to speak blank verse. She always put on a false, deep voice, much too large for her, to recite Shakespeare, and could not believe it could be naturally spoken in a colloquial way. Sometimes it isn't too good to be a child actress and ape the mannerisms of one's elders; but she knew all the plays and loved them, so Shakespeare, with me, was pre-natal, and was bred in my blood and bones. Mother and I had many a tussle in the years to come as to how to speak blank verse.

I am even named after one of Shakespeare's characters—Constance in "King John." She is a very tiresome woman, I think, and I don't know why they chose her.

My mother told me a funny little story about the part of Fleance when she played. The little girl was late one night at the theatre, and as she entered the stage door with her elder sister they were rushed on the stage. There was no time to do a thing, for the cue had been spoken, and as Fleance was pushed through the curtains, with her hair in newspaper crackers all over her head, thick hobnailed boots and a little mackintosh, the retainers looked a bit astonished, and so did Banquo; but such was the respect for Mr. Phelps's production that not a sound nor titter disturbed the watchers, and the scene went as well as ever.

Names like Garrick and Siddons were household words with us. My mother had read the lives and the struggles of all the greatest artists of the theatre. Perhaps her own disappointment and her lack of success made her take a deeper interest, for she adored the theatre and humbly accepted her bitter defeat, but she imbued me with all her latent ambition, and I determined that I would play the classic parts when I grew up—if I had to play them in a tent!

I must have been rather an awful child about this time

—very precocious and self-opinionated. The evolution from a child actress to a grown-up actress is an awful time to go through ; too old for children's parts, and too young for older parts, the probation period is extremely dull, especially if you have been nurtured on the flattery and adulation of theatre folk. It is almost impossible to step back to the ordinary routine of life, and be taken at one's proper value. How I missed the public ! And I got a little self-conscious before my childish audiences of the street. I cannot remember a single name of my little gutter acquaintances, but I loved them all, for they were the beginning of the great public for me. I was a mixture of child and woman, far too old in mind to find companionship in children, and yet a baby at heart. I thought of nothing but the theatre, and the glory of applause. There is no sensation in life so exhilarating, so inspiring, as to stand between the curtains and hear that sound. We in the theatre get quick returns and are soon forgotten ; our art lives in memory and in the spoken word of those who have loved us ; the greatest performance of an actor on the stage can never be recorded or recalled : we are shadows of a day—but the day is glorious. There can be only one greater sensation than acting, and that is to be a great singer, for they are the uncrowned kings and queens of the earth.

About this time there was a famous elephant in the Zoo, called Jumbo ; and another elephant, called Alice, was supposed to be his sweetheart. I had a very bumpy ride round the gardens on either Alice or Jumbo—I cannot remember which. Then Jumbo was sold to America, and there was a famous song written about him. It was a very sentimental song, about the parting of Jumbo and Alice. My mother used to sing it to me, and I would cry bitterly. Alice and Jumbo were as real to me as Romeo and Juliet. I can remember the first line of the song now :

“ Good-bye, dear Alice, soon we must part.”

It was a banal little song and this was the chorus :

“ Jumbo said to Alice, I love you.  
Alice said to Jumbo, I don't believe you do.  
If you really loved me, as you say you do,  
You wouldn't go to Yankeeland and leave me in the  
Zoo.”

The idea of Alice and Jumbo stayed in my mind for years. I longed to be able to give my mother all the luxuries of the world, and the first thing I wanted her to own was a pair of elephants like Jumbo and Alice. I used to promise her that I would buy Jumbo back for her from America, and for years after I grew up this used to be our special joke and my mother would say to me, if I got a good engagement, or a little extra money on my salary, “ Well, darling, when are you sending for the elephant ? ”

There was one awful time, when I was about eleven years old, when the indispensable engagement in the fit-ups did not materialize, and mother and I were left really stranded. We hadn't enough money to pay our rent and we had our meals at Lockhart's—very cheap meals they were, but very good food.

I was as grown-up and understanding as it was possible to be, and Mother talked our situation over with me. We saw that the way of the theatre was getting very difficult for her as the years went on. She was getting a little stouter and the part of Dandini was not quite so suitable to her figure. We discussed what was the best thing to do, and decided to open a dancing-class. We found a large bare room in the vicinity, for which we paid five shillings a week, and the hire of a piano was another five shillings. It was a dreadful upright and a good many of the notes were missing. We went to the expense of having it tuned and had a board painted and put on the door :

“ MADAM COLLIER'S DANCING CLASS ”

I played the piano—not very well. Waltzes were our speciality, as I knew two or three. I practised hard on

the old piano until I could get through them without breaking down.

Then we opened the class and waited for the pupils.

The daughter of one of the tradesmen—I think it was the greengrocer a few doors up the street—joined, more from curiosity than anything else, I think. She was the only pupil. We charged her three shillings for three lessons—a shilling a lesson—so we were seven shillings out on the first week. Then two more local girls joined, and the class of three, three times a week, brought us nine shillings, so we were out one shilling. Mother worked very hard teaching our pupils the latest waltzes and I banged away at the piano. Then the greengrocer's daughter threw it up as she found it very dull, so we were left with two. Madam Collier's Dancing Class did not seem to catch on locally and we lost five shillings on the next two weeks. I think the greengrocer's daughter had a good deal to do with the failure as she spread the rumour about dullness. So we had to give up that scheme.

Things were looking pretty bad and there were only a few pounds left—we didn't know which way to turn. Then my mother met a song writer who wrote lyrics for music-hall artistes, and he suggested that he should write her a song and get her on as an extra turn at one of the music-halls to try it.

It was a very bad song, and it cost us a pound to have the band parts made, but we were very hopeful. At last there was something to cling to. Our friend did his best, but even an opening for an extra unpaid turn was difficult—there were so many applicants and would-be aspirants—and we began to despair. But at last the extra turn materialized at a music-hall in Islington. My mother was to go on on the Saturday night a fortnight hence. It was wonderful! We saw vistas of a golden future, and never doubted success. We went out shopping and bought yards of tarlatan and sat up sewing the new dress. Mother was to be a kind of flapper with long ringlets and a dress with a sash, and a large bonnet.

The night came ; the music-hall was crowded. Mother had bought me a seat and I went in front and sat alone to watch the performance ! The theatre was full of smoke and packed with half-drunken men and women. I sat there, very proud and happy that, at last, my darling was to have her real chance. I felt sure of her success—I had heard the song practised so often, and she was wonderful in it. The house was very rowdy : there was a threepenny gallery which expressed its opinion in no uncertain way and without any regard for the feelings of the performers. In fact, the “ extras ” were a target for their ribald jokes.

But my mother had never been good at singing a number alone. Her turn came ; the orchestra, which had no time to rehearse for extras, played her refrain over twice, very much out of tune—even this got a laugh from the gallery. My mother must have heard it, and it unnerved her, for she came on very shyly and I could feel her nervousness from where I was sitting. She started singing, and her voice sounded shrill and thin and she could not even dance with her usual spirit. There was an ominous pause for a minute or two and then, amid a burst of cruel laughter, my mother was hissed off the stage.

The cost of the dress and song had made a big hole in our savings, but we bore it bravely. We never mentioned the disaster.

I went round to fetch her at the stage door ; I took her hand and we walked home together. I lit the gas and made the inevitable cup of tea.

Oh, those terrible days that followed, and the look on my mother's face. We had come to a deadlock. Engagements did not materialize. The few little things we had were gradually pawned, and we faced a very black future. It was because of her—young as I was—that I suffered and agonized so much. I contemplated all sorts of crimes. I loved her so dearly that I felt I had the right to go and take the lovely things out of the shop windows and give them to her—warm furs and pretty clothes and good food.



We were very shabby by this time and Mother's one good coat had been turned and furnished up for the inevitable agents' prowl. Mother was Latin and loved nice clothes. They mean so much more to some people than to others. I love clothes. They are a part of my individuality. I lose courage and character if I am badly dressed. Perhaps it is a weak and frivolous trait of character to be affected by these things—I don't know—but they have a distinct effect on me. We crept into the agents' offices, and because we were sensitive and anxious and looked poor the office boys seemed more casual and impertinent than ever. I lost my zest for these walks and loathed the agents, with their cruel torturing half-promises: "Nothing doing to-day. Look in to-morrow. I think I can fix you." And then to-morrow—the same thing.

Oh, the humiliation of being poor, the look of hostility in the world's eyes for one who has dared to fail! Why is poverty regarded as a crime instead of a misfortune?

We had to walk both ways now. We could not even afford the one-way fare. We would trudge home over Waterloo Bridge in silence. No more glamorous stories. Even my darling, with the bravest heart in the world, lost hope. For hunger—real hunger—means defeat.

How bitter and raging I felt that she couldn't have the best that life could hold, that she should have to keep up the unequal fight, unequipped, no longer very young, all the odds against her, and faced with the necessity to hack a living for the two of us out of the world. A shy, little, middle-aged woman with a growing child. How I longed to take the burden and bear it for her. But I was too young—as yet. I prayed and prayed to God to show me the way. I think my love for my mother was the spur that drove me on. It gave me tenacity and "stick-to-it-ness" which have lasted all through my life. It wasn't personal ambition to succeed for myself so much as a bitter determination to wrest from life the good



things for her, and to give her peace—to buy her that elephant!

An incentive is a marvellous thing. I am glad I had something to fight for, even as a child. There isn't much fun in success unless you can lay the trophies at the feet of your beloved ones. Had I had the ordinary bringing-up and been the child of successful parents I should probably have settled down to a complacent future and married some dull, kind man and been lost in comfortable obscurity; but I felt like the figurehead of a ship breasting the winds! Through those early storms and wide open seas there was ever for me the vision of the harbour—of steering my dear one safe to port.

Things were getting worse. My father had had a long illness, so he could not help us, and my mother's family were very poor and had their own children and financial affairs to attend to. We were too proud to ask for help from anybody.

At last a job turned up for Mother. It was in one of the smallest fit-ups, and our life was, if possible, more difficult than ever, though her marvellous sense of humour kept us going in spite of all.

But that tour soon came to an end and we had to face London again. We couldn't save any money as the salary was so small, and I could no longer be smuggled, neither could I be left behind as that would have meant double expense. So we got a little room in Kennington again and Mother was so tired and worn that I would do the tramps to the agents myself on her behalf.

I can see myself now quite clearly; a girl of thirteen, very big for my age, with my mother's cloak, the collar turned up over my chin, a hat pulled down over my eyes, my black hair, which in those days I wore in long ringlets, twisted up, and a spotted veil—all this to give myself age and dignity!

The thoughts that filled my mind, the ambitions! the dreams! I would stand sometimes on Waterloo Bridge

and look down into the deep and muddy waters and think of the future. That bridge was to me the dividing line. We used to speak of the tramps to the agents as "Going over the water," and that narrow strip of Thames was as wide as the widest ocean, for it seemed to me our whole life would change if ever I could earn enough money for us to *live* on the other side of the water.

I got very tired of those weary tramps and always the same news—but one of us had to go, and the walks didn't do me any harm; yet the monotony was awful, so I found ways and means of varying it. I would decide, one day, never to step on the lines where the paving-stones joined. This required considerable concentration and took a long time; or I would count the brown horses from the time I left the house until I reached the Strand. Once, I remember, I decided to hop over Waterloo Bridge on one foot. I ought to have known this would be too spectacular. I started off very well, but people looked at me in a very odd way, and if I caught their eye I would stop and lean over the bridge and gaze into the water until they had passed on. I got nearly to the middle, but one little errand-boy was so fascinated that he followed me and stopped whenever I did. He made me so self-conscious that I had to give it up and walk. This was very ignominious and, as I was superstitious, I was sure my failure meant bad luck. It got to be awful. I nearly drove myself mad. I would walk round every fourth lamp-post or bow to a bus with a piebald horse.

But the minute I was over the bridge and my feet touched the Strand it was London—London with its glamour and surprise and mystery. I loved the Law Courts and the old church in the Strand. I used to look at the Savoy Hotel and think of the luxury and splendour it contained, and vow that one day I would have a little of it too, for my mother and myself. I would stand outside the theatres and wonder if I should ever act in them—the Gaiety, the Lyceum, Drury Lane, and the Haymarket. If I wasn't too tired after the daily search for work for

my mother I used to walk to them and pay my respects, and stand between the columns of the Lyceum and look through the doors at the warm interior and long to be able to afford tickets to see Ellen Terry. Then the tramp back across Waterloo Bridge—and Kennington again. The only thing to look forward to was the next day, when I could get back to London ! My mother would be waiting for me eagerly, but, alas, I had no good news to bring her. And all the time the thought was growing in my brain that I would try to get an engagement for myself.

Then I began to press my own claims, but the agents wouldn't take me seriously as I was such a child. I must have looked ridiculous in any case dressed up in my mother's clothes ; and for several weeks there was no sign of work for either of us.

## CHAPTER V

AT last my chance came. I was taken on in the chorus for a revival of a musical comedy at the Criterion Theatre. I begged my mother that I might be allowed to do this, as we needed the practical necessities of life; and she consented. I stayed at the Criterion for only about six weeks. My salary was extremely small—I think thirty shillings a week. I had to pay for my lunch during the day's rehearsal, find my shoes and stockings, and my fares home at night. How often in those days, when people would give me a bunch of flowers or a box of chocolates, have I longed for a pair of stockings instead.

After the show I would wait at the corner of Piccadilly Circus to get my bus home. A strange, crude place, a strange place indeed for a girl of my age in those days, an amazing place for England to have tolerated so long. I was a girl alone, but, as I say, I was considerably older in mind than in years, and I was not in the least frightened by the unwelcome attentions I received quite openly, or the insults of the women who thought I was usurping their rights: tragic women—young women, old women—blatantly plying their sad trade in the public streets; and, the irony of it, Eros, the God of Love, looking on with unseeing eyes. When, at last, the bus came, I would climb on the top and try to get a seat by the driver. I loved the ride home at night. We went down Lower Regent Street, past the theatres and music-halls and hotels in the Strand. It took a long while, as the old fat bus-horses ambled along, so one had plenty of time to see the sights. The drivers in those days were charac-

ters and knew everything. They talked and gossiped the whole way and were very entertaining. I was always excited after the theatre, and the cool air blowing on my face and the jokes and talks with the driver were the best part of the day.

The very atmosphere of the theatre in those days stimulated me, as it always does. Hardships didn't matter—nothing mattered with all the future ahead and the strange, mysterious stirrings of life within me. I wasn't yet fourteen, and yet I was a woman with responsibility. But when the bus turned the corner of Waterloo Bridge and we began to cross the river again, my heart would sink and I was filled with apprehension and fear and misgivings for the future. My mother used to wait for me at the corner of the dreary, dark little turning where we lived, and I would go home to a bowl of bread and milk, and generally managed to sleep the sleep of the very young in spite of all my worries. And how proud and happy I was on salary night to be able to take my small earnings back to her and see the look of relief and gratitude on her face!

How happy I was in that first strange little engagement. It was the first time I had taken the helm and steered our frail craft.

How quickly after that I changed from a child to a woman! Although there was Kennington all day, there was the glorious evening at the theatre to look forward to, and the ride home at night. The tramp to my work, starting at about six o'clock, the dressing-room, the make-up and gaiety and laughter of the girls, their strange and Rabelaisian jokes, which I could not understand, the glorious, intoxicating applause at the end of the acts—it was just as stimulating to me as if I had earned it all, although I was only an insignificant girl in the back row of the chorus. I did not make myself up very well and was rather at the between-stage in looks—the chrysalis stage—I had not yet found my wings. And, alas, when they cut down expenses, I was one of the



first to be dismissed ; the strain began all over again for both of us.

About this time my father came home. He had changed and become more serious during his long illness, and his taste for the actual work of the stage was diminishing. He had no idea of my experience at the Criterion, and we dared not tell him, as he was determined I should not go on the stage. He was more deeply religious than ever, and as he had always been very highly strung and hypersensitive he misconstrued much of theatrical life which was entirely innocent. He had an awful dread of my ever taking up the stage seriously, and as this was my fixed determination we had many clashes. My mother tried hard to keep the peace ; she loved us both so dearly that the position must have been very hard for her. It was terribly difficult for all three of us. I was very high-spirited and hard to handle, and my father could never understand that I was growing up. I would do anything for my mother, who ruled me by her own weakness and bewildered sympathy with my most violent moods ; but I am sorry to say I defied my dear father because he tried to drive me.

We were too much alike, I suppose.

My uncle, Harry Collier, my mother's brother, who was one of "The Child Wonders" when they danced together, was the star of our family about this time. He was a famous clown and was engaged in all the best pantomimes on tour. I was very proud of him. He was as serious as all comedians are, and very fond of me. He put me through my paces in those days, and prophesied great things for me in the future. Nobody else in the family thought much of my acting ability, and even my mother hoped that I would choose some other way of earning a living. She did not want me to repeat her experience of the "thirds" and the "fit-ups," and did not, in her heart, think I had enough talent to aspire to the London stage. But my Uncle Harry believed in me, and encouraged by him my determination and





MY FATHER



ambition grew. My father scolded me, but there was nothing he could do or say that could alter my decision.

Just after my fourteenth birthday I made up my mind that I would not stand any more. I begged my father to let me go back to the theatre. He was adamant. He had made up his mind that I was to be a hospital nurse. This I could never have done—I had, and still have, a horror of illness. In those days I used to flatter myself that I loved humanity too much to see it suffer—a ridiculous argument. I now know that it was mere cowardice, and that I wanted a more worldly life.

I could get no sympathy from anyone at home, as even my mother was against me in this. But my Uncle Harry was like a mischievous boy, and encouraged me secretly; we had long talks about the theatre, and he egged me on to deeds of daring.

The quarrels and arguments dragged on for months, and I determined to take the law into my own hands. I had a final and terrible quarrel with my father. He was so angry with me that I was forbidden to leave the house. That was the climax. All this opposition had roused my obstinacy and determination to its fullest extent, and in spite of the threats to lock me in I got out. Over the water I went in a furious rage, determined that I would never return unless I had some work or hope of work of some sort. I didn't know what I meant to do or where I would go, but a blind, white fury drove me on and made me run and run and run until I was exhausted. Over Waterloo Bridge to London I went. It was the end of January and raining and cold. I had fourpence, but I wouldn't take a bus, as I meant never to return, and I wanted the money for food. I made up my mind to sleep under the arches.

When I reached the Strand my temper had cooled considerably, and I was rather frightened and wanted to cry. I went up Wellington Street to the first agency I could think of, but on my way I had to pass the stage door of the Gaiety Theatre. Some impulse made me

stop—that magic wand again. I went in and demanded an interview with George Edwardes from the stage door-keeper, Jupp. He was amazed—it was like asking to see the Grand Lama of Thibet. Appointments were made weeks beforehand, and even then it was very difficult to be allowed to see the great one. If I had commanded the walls of Jericho to fall he could not have been more surprised.

Not all the agencies in the world could have procured me that interview with George Edwardes, but it happened quite by chance. Mr. Edwardes had been rehearsing and was coming through the stage door. He looked at me casually at first, and then a little harder. He asked me what I wanted, and I had the boldness to say that I had come to see George Edwardes and I wanted an engagement in his company. I did not realize that I was talking to the great one himself.

He took me back to his room and made me take off my wet hat and coat and had a good look at me. I explained to him my father's attitude and my determination to get on in the theatre. I did not tell him my real age. It may be that he was amused at my enthusiasm, but he promised me an engagement and said that I was to join the company in a few weeks' time. He was the most charming and the kindest of men. He gave me some tea and made me go home.

In George Edwardes I made my first real friend of the theatre. He had me taught dancing, singing, speaking and fencing. He gave me my equipment, and I can never be grateful enough to him. I am not the only one he has helped and encouraged and inspired in the theatre.

Mr. Edwardes asked me to bring my mother to see him. I did not tell my father for days of the good news, but my mother knew all about it, and was so frightened that she begged me not to go ahead—the Gaiety Theatre seemed a terrible place for her ewe lamb—but nothing would induce me to give up my engagement. My father

had to be told, and I dreaded the moment, but in spite of his violent disapproval I held out.

My mother came with me to the interview with Mr. Edwardes, determined to tell him my real age and explain the contract I had signed was not valid as I was a minor. However, his great charm and personality completely won her over, as it did everybody. She came out defeated, and I was a member of the Gaiety Company. I couldn't believe it was true.

There was a large class of girls being taught as I was, and we had our lessons on the stage nearly every day, or in the foyer of the theatre. Mr. Edwardes had the best singing and dancing masters for us, and we were taught to use the foils that we might be graceful and have good balance and poise on the stage.

Some of the girls found the lessons irksome and the regularity and discipline tiresome, and dropped out of the classes; but I stuck to them and have been everlastingly grateful to Mr. Edwardes.

I shall never forget the day I went to my first rehearsal. I did not sleep at all the previous night and got up to dress about five o'clock in the morning. Mother had made me a special frock for the occasion, and my hair was tied back with a ribbon and hung down my back. I was a very frightened girl as I went through that swing-door and made my first entrance on the Gaiety stage. There I was in the midst of it in the heart of the theatre world, among the great personalities of musical comedy stage of the time! Cecilia Loftus was the leading lady. She was little more than a child, with her hair loose about her shoulders like me. Arthur Roberts was the comedian. The play was "Don Juan."

The reigning beauties at the Gaiety at that time were Hetty Hamer, Ethel Earl, Marie Studholme and several others whose names I cannot recall; they were the established beauties of the town, and worthy to be called so. Hetty Hamer was magnificent, tall and commanding, with great blue eyes and auburn hair, statuesque and splendid.

Marie Studholme was not so big, and she had golden curls, like a baby's, all over her head, and a lovely little face like a Greuze. There were many more of them—startling beauties and great personalities.

The Gaiety Girls of those days really superseded the leading people in the play, and were quite as well known to the public. It seemed impossible that such a bevy of exquisite creatures could exist in the same theatre. They were like a bouquet of wonderful roses, and I have never seen their equal except in the Ziegfeld Follies of New York ; but Florenz Ziegfeld has (as George Edwardes had) the true eye for beauty.

A girl on the stage is generally the blossom of her family. If you look into the lives of stage folk you will find that some exquisite girl has dull and unattractive sisters and brothers, and that she is the pride and envy of them all. It is like a tree that gives forth one perfect flower.

And so the blossoms of many little obscure families were gathered together to make that bouquet of lovely young womanhood that was presented to the theatre-goer. If some of them were broken on the way it is not to be wondered at. Each one of those girls seemed to have some obligation to fulfil—a sister to take care of or some pensioner to keep. They had wonderful manners ; they did not smoke or drink or swear. No wonder that so many of them, at that time, married into the aristocracy—it was as if Nature were fortifying herself and using the blood and strength of these magnificent plebeians to build a finer race.

There was about the Gaiety in those days an air of *camaraderie* from the highest to the lowest—very different from the feeling in the theatre to-day. They acted together for years and knew each other very well. Nobody gave themselves airs or worried if they did a little extra work. Everybody called each other by their Christian names, and we were like one great big family, but it was difficult to be accepted and a great achievement to be known as a Gaiety Girl.





MY FIRST APPEARANCE AT THE 'GAIETY'



I shall never forget their kindness to me when I was a beginner. Very often I would go to tea with one of the queens of the theatre, but I was never allowed to meet their admirers, and they guarded me as if I were in a convent. They were the best of chaperons. The only danger was that one became used to their jewels, their exquisite clothes and their luxurious lives, and instinctively longed for expensive things too.

E. E. gave me my first bit of jewellery. She had had some of her magnificent diamonds reset, and when they came home in their new splendour the old-fashioned settings were returned as well. There were some tiny rose diamonds amongst them, and we spent an afternoon pushing them out with a pin and a pair of nail-scissors on to a piece of paper. There was quite a little pile when we had finished, and she said that she would have them made up into a brooch for me. I nearly died with excitement when at last the parcel came home from the jewellers. The brooch was set in the form of a little heart, and when Miss E. pinned it on my frock I felt that I was wearing the Koh-i-noor. I never took it off; I even wore it on my night-dress, and would rush to the glass in the morning to see it glitter and sparkle. I had a pin and safety chain—nearly as big as a cable—fastened to it, and I really worried in a bus lest it should be noticed and I should be followed. I thrilled with terror in a lonely street at night for fear I should be bludgeoned and robbed of it! I don't suppose anybody even saw it—it was so small. I look at it sometimes now, and remember how I adored it and the pleasure and terror it gave me. I have never valued any jewel so much.

Any girl who is normal likes pretty clothes and amusement, and, in moderation, these are necessary, for one cannot work without play—and we worked very hard at the Gaiety. Mr. Edwardes did not tolerate slackness in any form, but we were eager to enjoy ourselves when work was over. All the girls were charming and gay; they did not hamper their hosts with undue convention-

ality, and in consequence young men of means migrated towards them as a moth goes to the light—I think to counteract the hypocrisy and prudery of the Victorian age.

It was an amazing place, the Gaiety. The marvellous flowers, bouquets with perhaps a jewel attached, sent round from the front by anonymous admirers who asked for no return! Night after night you would see the same people in the same stalls; they would book their seats for the whole season. There was an air of established success and warm excitement about the whole theatre. I adored my Gaiety days.

When the play was over at night I used to catch my bus at the corner of Waterloo Bridge. My salary was so small that my mother could not afford to come and fetch me, so I used to fight for a seat, and if any of the scene hands or staff happened to be on that omnibus they would always see that I got a place.

Mr. Edwardes had only intended me for the chorus, but I remember so well, about a fortnight after rehearsals had begun, how I came to realize I had looks. I vaguely suspected it, but had never been quite sure whether my looks were different from other people's until that particular morning. I might have guessed it, as there was a very high standard at the Gaiety in those days, and if I had been plain I should not have been engaged—the girls were not chosen so much for their ability to act and sing and dance as they are nowadays. The modern chorus girl is part of the actual scheme of the play, and needs a really good voice and a true knowledge of dancing. We only had to stand about in those days, and nobody worried about a voice.

This particular morning about twelve girls, including myself, were called down before the others to be chosen for some tableau which was to be put into the play. Out of the twelve, five were needed for the tableau, and of all the girls in the theatre at that time we twelve were the picked ones. We were nervous and anxious to be

selected, as it meant a small rise in salary and a step higher up the ladder of fame, and also that each would be an acknowledged Gaiety beauty.

We stood in a row. The stage manager sat in the stalls. He called across the space of the orchestra to another girl and myself to stand out. I shall never forget my humiliation. The other girl was so indignant that she left the theatre, but I sat on the step between the pass-door and the stage, in the darkness, and sobbed! The selection went on, and one or two of the girls were chosen and the rest dismissed. Then the stage manager came through the pass-door to get on the stage and stumbled over me in the dimness. He was amazed, and asked what on earth was the matter with me. I was so hurt that I had the courage to tell him I thought he need not have been so unkind as to humiliate me publicly. He roared with laughter and said :

“How absurd! You were one of the first selected. I didn’t think it necessary to keep you two kids standing.”

And, sure enough, I was given the principal place in the tableau. From that time on I was an established Gaiety beauty.

The tableau was a great success on the first night, and Mr. Edwardes was very pleased with me ; so pleased that he arranged some tableaux at the Empire, and Hetty Hamer, Marie Studholme and I posed as the Three Graces. It was a great honour to be allowed to pose with those two beautiful women. Their pictures were sold everywhere, and they were world-famous. I had to go from the Gaiety to the Empire in a four-wheeler each night and play at the two theatres.

People were beginning to talk about my looks, and Mr. Edwardes kept me at the Empire to play Cleopatra in the ballet of “Faust.” Little did I think I should ever play the superb Shakespeare’s Cleopatra at the first theatre in England—His Majesty’s.

Funnily enough, I met Arthur Roberts only a few months ago. He was just finishing his contracts at the

Gaiety when I went there as a girl of fourteen. He said to me :

“Miss Collier, you have been the greatest surprise of my life. I remember thinking that you had a splendid appearance, but that you were one of the stupidest and most incompetent girls I had ever had to deal with!”

So you will see my talents did not develop quickly—it was the wrong environment, I suppose. From babyhood I had every intention of being a serious actress, and musical comedy did not suit me. Even in my Gaiety days I used to dash across, after the play, and wait among the lookers-on at the stage door of the Lyceum in the hope of seeing Sir Henry Irving come out. I once had an interview with Bram Stoker, who was then manager of the Lyceum, but he would not even consider me as a super.



## CHAPTER VI

**A**BOUT this time the South African boom was on, and money was showered on the Gaiety like golden rain. Everybody got splendid presents and flowers. These men—a lot of them had been miners in the diamond fields in South Africa—suddenly found themselves millionaires. They were most of them Jews ; very kind-hearted and generous. They were back in London after the great struggle, and they had nothing to do with their vast fortunes except to give everybody a good time.

There was to be a wonderful party given to the principal people from the theatre by George Edwardes and the South African group. The party was to be in a private room at the Savoy Hotel, and, much to my delight, I got an invitation. My mother never allowed me to go out after the theatre, but I implored and begged for this one time, and she gave way.

Then came the dress question. I went to one of the girls who had been kind to me and confided to her that the best clothes I possessed for this were a blue serge skirt and a white satin blouse. She laughed and said :

“ Well, you can’t very well go in those, as it is to be a very smart party.”

I had no evening dress at all, or anything that resembled one. It all seemed hopeless. I was bitterly disappointed, and resigned myself. I think my friend realized my disappointment and knew that my mother could not afford to buy me anything new. I gave up all thought of going to the party, and went home and cried myself to sleep.

The next night, at the theatre, all the girls were talking about the wonderful party that was to take place a few nights ahead. They were discussing what they were to wear. My friend said to me :

“I have been thinking over what you said, and as the party’s in a private room I shouldn’t worry about the blouse and skirt—just come like that.”

Her words delighted me, and I went home and told my mother, who, very reluctantly, gave her consent when she saw how eager I was.

When the night came I appeared with my white satin blouse, washed and ironed, and my skirt, sponged and pressed. It was my first party at the Savoy ! I went to my dressing-room, which I shared with five other girls. There was a lot of chattering and giggling as I opened the door, and they were all standing in a row in front of my dressing place. As I came across into the room they divided. . . . There, on my table, spread out, lay everything I could possibly need—a lovely evening frock, a cloak, stockings, petticoats, gloves, and a fan. Each girl had given what she could afford. That was the loveliest present I have ever had—my first evening dress. I felt like Cinderella indeed, and I went to the ball !

I think those women, who were blasé with luxury and amusement, got more happiness out of watching me that night, and the joy they had given me, than they had known for a long time.

It was a wonderful party. The Savoy was the fashionable hotel in those days, very much smaller than it is now. The public dining-room was the most becoming in London. It was panelled in dark oak, with soft lights, and women looked their very best. Most of the hotel was on the river-side, and one could see the Thames in the distance. On this occasion we had a private room, and the millionaires entertained the company.

That evening was my first public appearance—my coming-out, so to speak—and, with my lovely clothes, the luxurious food and the excitement, my beauty blos-



AT THE 'GAITY'



somed, as it always does when one is very happy. Happiness is the greatest beautifier in the world. I had my first taste of homage. I must have looked my best, for everybody was very complimentary. The men were kind and simple, though not very cultivated. They had worked themselves in the diamond mines before their luck had turned. Their return to England was triumphant, and they meant to enjoy themselves. They distributed largesse right and left, and each of us girls received fifty pounds worth of shares, which could be converted into money if we wished. To me, who had never had a farthing in the world, it seemed like a fortune.

I was driven home in a beautiful brougham. I am afraid I was snob enough to be ashamed of my address, as we were living in a kind of workmen's dwelling—a little flat which we had converted—in a road with the horrid name of "Borret." Most of the girls lived in Belgravia. The contrast was awful. However, with my fifty pounds, I felt that we could move to Mayfair if we wished. We could at last "get over the water."

Mother's surprise when she saw me in the beautiful frock and cloak was another great delight. There were tears in her eyes from sheer pleasure, because, I suppose, she had not realized that I could look so nice.

We were playing "The Shop Girl" at that time, and I was just over sixteen, on the way to seventeen, when looks, if one has any, are just beginning to determine themselves. I had my hair up by this time, and in those days it was worn rather out at the back in a Grecian knot, which suited my profile very well. I made a conquest that night, and a few months afterwards became engaged to one of the millionaires. He was about thirty-five years older than myself; a little, kind, fat man. He showered lovely gifts and flowers on me, and for a time I liked the luxury and excitement—lunching every day at the best hotels, with splendid food and wines, having nice shoes and gloves and frocks, and, as I had a passion for hats, being able to buy one whenever I felt

like it. I had a comfortable brougham also to bring me home from the theatre at night—no more scrambling for a place on the bus—and, above all, the sympathetic envy of the girls at the theatre; the thing I liked best being able to help them a little in return for all their kindness to me.

I gave a wonderful party to celebrate my engagement, and invited all my friends. It was the most expensive party I have ever given, and I was queen of it. The girls were very proud of me and felt that they were responsible for my success—as they certainly were. It amused and gratified them that their prodigy had made such a splendid conquest. The party was held at the fashionable Savoy, as usual; there were about twenty of us all together, and each of the girls received a present which I had chosen according to her individual taste. They were all to be my bridesmaids.

The great moment of the evening arrived when I was called upon to make my first public speech. I had guessed that this might happen, and had thought of it for so many days beforehand that when the moment actually came I was completely overcome with nervousness and excitement, and I did not get very far. It ended in my usual ignominious burst of tears. I always cry when I am happiest—seldom in grief.

My mother was very pleased with the engagement, and glad that I was to settle down and leave the stage, but she declined to move “over the water” until I was married. I think she guessed that the glamour might fade. She was very fond of my fiancé, and he was a good and kind man, but very unattractive. I had a dread of him kissing me good night, and even the lovely gifts ceased to give me pleasure when I had to thank him for them. I must have been very material-minded when I was very young, but that is the only time that I have seriously considered money. It was such a relief after years of poverty and scraping. My future husband put five hundred pounds in the bank to be drawn on by my



mother and myself for my clothes and anything we might need. Not to have to scrape and pinch for every penny was such a glorious change that I thought any sacrifice was worth it. But, although I liked him very much and he was to prove a good friend in the future, I could not go on with it, and one day I confided in my mother and asked her advice, and she, with her wonderful sympathy and understanding, immediately broke off my engagement. After that we could not go on accepting gifts and money, so we went back to our scrimping again, but I learned then that the only way to live is to be true to ourselves at whatever cost and sacrifice, and, although I should have liked to be a rich woman and have had lifelong security, such things were not for me, and never could be. Money could never mean very much to me, although I love the things it can give.

The girls in the theatre thought I was mad. They were terribly disappointed. They told me it was the greatest chance of my life—and it probably was. But we, my mother and myself, turned back to the difficult and stormy life that was to be our lot and tramped along quite happily—because we had each other.

Oh, the joy of being free again, to breast the waves, to feel the wind in my face and the old struggle—my figurehead feeling! I never had such a sense of relief in my life. My mother never reproached me or regretted, or urged me to reconsider, although I know it was a great disappointment to her too. I wonder what would have become of me had I seized that first opportunity! Certainly there would have been no Constance Collier to write these little memories. I should have been a widow now (he died long ago), bejewelled and luxurious and sunk in the oblivion of satiety.

By this time I had become very popular. My life was most incongruous and full of absurd contrasts. I would lunch and dine at the most expensive restaurants and go home to our workman's flat in Kennington at night! I still had some of my good clothes left, and I had had a

rise in salary, so I could afford a hat or two, and was allowed a pound a week for pocket money and expenses ; but that did not go very far, as I became more and more fond of amusement, and my needs grew in consequence. That time in my life worried my mother a good deal, I know. I was overtired with the exciting life I led and became disagreeable and sullen, because in my innermost heart I knew I was in the wrong. I hated and was ashamed of our poor and skimpy furniture and the street we lived in. I dreaded the talks about ways and means, and the quarrels with my father because I came home late. If my mother waited up for me, I was annoyed. So she pretended to go to sleep, but I could feel her watchful presence as I passed her door, and that irritated me. She was ever so patient and tactful and never tried to restrain or thwart me, and so she kept her control over me. It was natural for a girl to like pleasure, and all sorts of amusements were forced upon me. I could have lunched and dined out three or four times a day had I wished, and on Sundays there were long lovely days on the river—whole parties of us in big launches.

The river was the great amusement in my Gaiety days, and on Sunday mornings, about eleven o'clock, magnificent launches, decorated with flowers, would be waiting at Skindles' steps for the different parties of stage folks and their friends. Then we would go many miles, lunching on the launch and dining at some up-river hotel ; and back to Skindles in the moonlight with the boat decorated with festoons of light. Then home, tired out, with very little time for my own folk and a childish intolerance for the squalor of my surroundings. My mother would be watching for me, her dear brown eyes rather moist, but she never uttered a reproach ; and so my selfish neglect of her grew. She never let me see that she had noticed the unconscious cruelty of youth, and she had perhaps spent a stuffy day in hot London, where the smell of the stale heat of the pavements fill one with depression. I would come in late at night after

my lovely cool day and brush past her and rush up to bed, scarcely speaking, because I secretly hated my selfishness.

I had many admirers, but never a heart-beat for any one of them. Perhaps that made me more attractive, as the nature of the male is to hunt and the only real interest is the thing that eludes. I had never at that time been seriously attracted to anyone—luckily for me.

We used to go at night, a whole lot of us together, to a club quite near the Prince of Wales's Theatre. I was the breadwinner, and took the law into my own hands and would not listen to any advice. I wanted my head. My mother knew this was a dangerous time for me, and, with infinite tact, she managed me. I joined many of the night parties. This was not good for my health or my nerves, and I became restless and dissatisfied. Then my clothes began to get shabby, and I resented that and, for the first and only time in my life, got into debt. The tradespeople flattered me and allowed me to run up bills. They insisted on my having hats and frocks and asked me to open accounts. It seemed so easy, and paying-time such a long way off. The temptation was very natural and my debts were not very much, but they seemed enormous to me. How terrified I was when the bills had to be met! I had no money except the salary I earned, which went for household expenses, and the pound a week allowance, and I owed over £35. I had no prospect of paying this money, and it was useless to tell my mother. But she, poor darling, noticed the change in me and my sleepless nights, that had begun to tell on my looks. Then, one awful day, a writ was served upon me. I shall never forget my confession to my mother and our despair. We were helpless. We did not know what to do. I had nobody in the world to go to but my mother, although to most of my friends at that time the sum would have been little more than the cost of a day's amusement. Still, I could not put

myself under an obligation to them. I realized my folly then, and all my old love and dependence on my darling returned. I poured out my heart to her and told her of my snobbish shame at our poverty, and how I had tried to keep her in the background because she looked so poor and I did not want my grand and expensive friends to see our shabby home.

Oh, the smiling understanding of her! She never uttered a word of reproach, and when she drew me to her I was no longer the silly hectic girl of the night-clubs and parties; I was back in her arms in the cornfields of Devonshire, a little tired child, with my arms full of flowers and my head on her breast.

But things grew difficult. I went to George Edwardes and told him all my troubles. He gave me a very severe lecture, and found out for the first time that I was going out at night and wasting my health and spoiling my looks; and, on condition that I gave up night parties and attended to my work and my classes, he paid the debt for me and arranged to stop a pound a week out of my salary until it was worked off. It had given me such a shock and was such a lesson to me that I have always had a horror of debt since then.

I settled down after that and worked very hard at my singing and my dancing, and when my birthday came Mr. Edwardes was so pleased with me that he wiped off the whole debt as a birthday present.

I never regretted that lesson, although it was a severe one, and it has lasted me all my life.

My voice had improved so much and I had so completely justified Mr. Edwardes' belief in me that, when they put on a revival of "The Gaiety Girl" at Daly's, I was the first singing Gaiety Girl and given my first part. It was a very small one, but I had a solo all to myself and became a principal.

I became very spoilt in those days. I was photographed three times a week by Downey, for which I received a settled income, and most of the other photo-



WHEN I WAS A 'GAIETY GIRL.'





graphers. Two famous dressmakers, one in London and one in Paris, dressed me for nothing, and a famous English designer called her models after me and made my clothes at a very nominal fee. A famous jeweller would allow me to wear anything I wanted. The jewels were well insured before I left the shop, and on the following day, regularly, a messenger would call to take them back. So I presented a magnificent appearance. My picture advertised all sorts of ware, and face creams and soaps, and I gave advice in all the papers on how to keep healthy and beautiful and young. If I had followed the regime I laid down, I could never have finished in the twenty-four hours.

No wonder I got used to luxury and took it as my right to have all I wanted.

If ever I was hard-up—and a lot depended on my looking well—Mr. Reville, who is one of the greatest dressmakers in the world, proved a marvellous friend. In all his busy life, he helped many of us when we were poor. He would lend me cloaks and gowns and hats for special occasions, but with the break of dawn a messenger would arrive to take my glorious raiment away, and I was left, like Cinderella, in my rags. People often wondered how I managed to look so magnificent on my small salary. Little did they know the secret of it! Mr. Reville's kindness to me was unfailing, but I am happy to say that for many years now I have not had to impose on it.

During the run of "The Gaiety Girl" I really did fall in love for the first time, and with a middle-aged actor of a most magnetic personality. He was a comedian and a star and was very popular on the London stage—a really great artist—but he was not in musical comedy. From the first moment he saw me he exerted all his magnetism, and completely won my heart. It was on a Sunday at one of the launch parties that I have spoken of that we met, and the contrast of his witty and amusing mind with those of the fatuous youths who spent their

lives in finding new diversions for us Gaiety Girls was very marked.

I wish I could give some impression of the river in those days. It was a very different thing to drive down from London in a high dog-cart, perhaps a tandem, or in a private hansom, or even a coach. It meant starting very early and arriving about lunch-time. Or, if you went by train, it was packed with the most celebrated and amusing people, and the arrival on Maidenhead Station was like a first night at a play. Everybody was there. We seemed to have genuine summers then, because the women wore light muslin dresses and large floppy hats, and looked like great butterflies. We would assemble on Skindles' lawn, which was very exclusive and very smart. The launches would all be lined up, with the waiters rushing about arranging everything—champagne and flowers and lobster salads. They didn't go in for cocktails in those days, and there were no great steamers, and no gramophones and no loud speakers, and no jazz. There was a great air of romance about everything, and the river had mystery and glamour. The mystery is gone, and so is romance, and the river life seems to have faded away. It rains all the summer now. There is no more drifting about in wide punts with lovely cushions, and the twilight falling, and the dragonflies shooting about, and the little moor-hens dipping in and out of the water, and sometimes, under the trees, in the shadows, the beady eyes of a river rat looking at you—nervous eyes, but not unfriendly! It was fun to watch him shoot into the water with a great splash and swim away as fast as he could. To feast by the lovely gardens reaching down to the river, with their masses of flowers and green lawns, and then, in the darkness, to moor the punt or launch to a bank and listen to some one singing, or a nightingale, perhaps holding the hand of the one you thought you loved best in the world!

One night, I remember, we moored near Quarry Woods, and an exquisite voice came across the darkness. It was

magic with the beauty of those woods all around us and the soft river lapping against the boat, accompanying the song—Melba was singing!

But all these things have passed away in this commercial age. You cannot expect the nightingales to compete with jazz, so they've flown away, and the little moor-hens are too frightened to dive in and out the river when they're ridden down by great steamers with people dancing and drinking and shouting. As for the rats, they have gone inland—and it rains every day, and poor old Father Thames is old-fashioned.

How in love I was!

It may have been the moonlight and the river or his very experienced love-making that captured me, for he was notoriously unscrupulous where women were concerned. He wasn't wicked, just sentimental.

What a difference there is between those two little words "sentiment" and "sentimentality." They are whole worlds apart—and he was a sentimental man. How exquisitely painful are the pangs of first love! I and my forbears were Arabs. I ceased to be civilized at all and felt myself his abject slave. He even superseded my Harlequin. He overwhelmed me with attentions of the most subtle kind, more insidious than blatant gifts of jewels. He knew the way to endow the slightest gesture with grace, the most commonplace action with enchantment; and yet he must have been well on the way to fifty, and I was not yet eighteen. But it was my first romance.

How I loved him! Although I saw him constantly, the minute I received my pound allowance on Saturday morning I would take a hansom and drive up and down in front of his flat or past the theatre where he was rehearsing in case there was a chance of seeing him walk down the street. My pound didn't go very far, and I was left stranded for the rest of the week. Nothing matters when we are in love!

We became engaged to be married. Mother didn't

like him at all or approve of my association with him, but I took it all quite seriously, and so, I thought, did my elderly lover. However, our engagement dragged on. Then I began to get on his nerves, as I had not at all the weak character he had imagined. We dined together one night, and from little things our squabble grew into a bitter quarrel. He said I was a child and did not understand anything about life. I, I suppose, was jealous and stupid, and insisted on being told if he was seeing anybody else. He confessed there was some one who had a greater claim and had been his friend for years, and, moreover, that he had not yet got his divorce from his wife, whom he had married twenty years before. I was amazed and shocked at such duplicity, as that side of life had not touched me. Then my amazement turned to furious indignation. I demanded to know what the farce of pretending to be engaged to him had meant. I told him many home truths that he would not be likely to forget.

He was terribly angry, and although he was a gentleman in the worst sense of the word he lost his manners for once and said how dared I criticize him when I was only a Gaiety Girl after all. How grateful I have been to him since for those words—only a Gaiety Girl! I was sinking into the oblivion of pleasure. I was gorged with amusement and admiration. Gone were the dreams of my childhood, the stories of Mr. Phelps and Siddons and Garrick and Kean. I had forgotten all about the classic parts—the ambitions of the days of Leamington Green. I was merely one of the crowd, and content to be so. I had ceased to struggle, and when we cease to struggle our soul dies. But his words roused me. Only a Gaiety Girl! I determined I would justify myself—I would rise above my environment at any cost. I would make him take back those words. I would do what as a child I had determined to do. My love for him died at that moment. It had never really existed.

I made up my mind, at the end of my present engage-

ment at Daly's, I would leave musical comedy at whatever cost and fight to get into the legitimate theatre, where I knew I really belonged if I was ever to become anything. I loved musical comedy, but I should never have been any good at it, as I was too big and my voice was not good enough. I knew my chance would come in the serious theatre. Years after we met—my first love and I. They say there is nothing so dead as a dead love; and how tragic it is to look at a person you have adored and wonder what it was that attracted you! There is the same gesture, the same look that thrilled you, and you feel no stir. It is one of the saddest things in life—the thoughts and years we waste, the love we give. Merely the outcome of our imagination that isn't love at all. We glorify people with our own thoughts—and then to see them, stripped of all glamour, standing there, little futile human beings that we thought were gods!

He was quite an old man then, and I was leading lady at His Majesty's Theatre; and I reminded him of his words and told him of my everlasting gratitude to him for them, for if it had not been for that chance phrase I should have still been a Gaiety Girl!



## CHAPTER VII

**T**HERE are many jealousies in the theatre—childish ones, more or less—but if the fight is on and the enemy is in difficulties theatre folk drop their weapons and fly to help the very people they have hated most. But sometimes some of us are rather tiresome in success.

I had by this time attained the dignity of an understudy to myself at Daly's. She was older than I was, and, consequently, very jealous of me, as she thought she ought to have been playing the part instead of me. Probably she was right, as she had a much better voice than I had, but I suppose I had a little more of that individual touch, a little more of that personality which is even more important in the theatre than talent. But there are some people in the theatrical profession who will persist in thinking that Fate is against them, that they are full of genius and unrecognized talents, and that the reason other people succeed is because they have more influence. No one has ever helped me in the theatre with their influence. It has been sheer hard work and my own ability, and my natural gift to seize opportunities and try my hardest to better myself and my talent and never to think I was good enough. It is no good pitying one's self; the thing is to pick out one's defects and try to better them.

However, my understudy was of the former class of actress, and resented me terribly because of the very tiny success I was having and because of my youth.

It was the last night of the run of "The Gaiety Girl," and I felt very ill. My head was aching and I was so giddy that I could hardly stand, but I would not have



missed that last night for worlds, as we were each to take a separate call before the curtain at the end, and I knew the management were presenting every principal with a bouquet. My one thought, through all my giddiness and pain, was my first publicly-presented bouquet. Everybody said how ill I looked, and the stage manager begged me to go home, but nothing would induce me. My bouquet was an obsession. I babbled about it in my dressing-room; it meant all the world to me. I think I must have been a little delirious. I managed to get as far as my last entrance but one, and when I came off the stage I was so weak I sank down on the stairs leading to the dressing-room. I remember no more until I woke up several weeks later. My understudy went on for the last scene, and received my bouquet—and kept it. I was ill with scarlet fever, and all the time, in my ravings, I talked about the bouquet, so they bought me another one, and the stage manager came and presented it to me formally on behalf of the management as I lay there in bed. After that I began to get better. Rehearsals were beginning for the new play at Daly's by this time, and I got my call from the management; but I had had many hours to think during my convalescence, and I determined that I would not go back, but would get an engagement in drama or comedy, even if I had to begin at the beginning all over again.

They say there are three things in life which we can never recall or forget—"the spoken word, the unkind deed, the neglected opportunity." I could never forget that spoken word, that casually-flung-out phrase—"only a Gaiety Girl." If it had not been for that my ambition would have died. I should have gone on contentedly until my looks had faded and some one more beautiful and youthful had succeeded me. I thought of my unkind deeds—my neglect of my dear mother and father during those silly two years—of my neglected opportunities, when I could have been working at my acting and improving myself generally—getting myself

ready, so to speak ; for Shakespeare says, " The readiness is all."

My darling mother and I were back as we were before. All was forgotten and we were comrades again, facing the world together. She was my henchman, willing to follow me in whatever I decided to do. What I would give never to have hurt her, never to have seen the pain in those eyes of hers, which were like a stag's eyes ! It was time I pulled up my stakes and moved on, or where should I have been to-day ?

What became of the many beautiful girls of my youth ? They could not all have married well, and few of them, except the really great ones, survived the struggle. Their tragedy was that they were so young, and luxury became the habit of their youth, and as the years went on they had nothing to substitute for their beauty to equip them in the fight for life.

Failure in the theatre is a tragedy indeed for the girl who has looks and no particular talent. The glamour of the theatre that attracts like a light the mysterious evil things of the night, things that sting and poison and leave their trail of slime—that is no fault of the theatre. There are just as many snares outside, but one does not hear so much about them. There is temptation in every walk of life for girls who are pretty and have not sufficient character to balance their good looks. Perhaps the gates are open a little wider for the girls on the stage, and contact with the rest of the community is freer than in any other calling ; her beauty is exposed and exploited to the public, and anyone can get into communication with her if she is foolish enough to let them do so. So many girls are deluded in the belief that because their friends have money and influence a permanent position in the theatre can be bought. A girl may be given a first chance, perhaps, by some man who is rich and attracted by her young beauty ; but, fortunately, it is the public who make their own favourites, and not any individual, and all the foisting and boosting will

not make the public accept any star whom they have not themselves elected. If a girl gives herself for false values, what does she receive in return—a month or two of seeming success and power, and then the man gets tired of paying for failure and looks for a fresh face?

It is amazing how short is the successful life of the girl who goes just for the glamour and excitement of the stage; how soon for her the outer darkness—the most ghastly life in the world—the constant search for work, the contempt and ridicule of the shifty gentlemen who, perhaps, only a few years before, gave that very same girl her first opportunity on the stage. Gradually her few trumpery possessions go—no more flowers, no more champagne, no more parties.

Where are they? How do they live and where do they go when they stray away from the theatre? I knew some of those girls who, when their beauty began to fade, hid their shabbiness beneath fur coats and jewels; they put all their wealth in the shop-window of life and, behind their seeming prosperity, were very often hungry, but they would not sell their jewels and furs until the last moment because they had to make a show and seem prosperous at any cost.

I knew one of them very well in those old days. I met her one day in the Strand. It was summer, and she was wearing a beautiful fur coat which was fastened up rather tight to her neck. I admired it very much. It was worth, I should think, about £200. I asked her if she wasn't very hot, and laughed and teased her and said she was wearing it for swagger. Tears came into her eyes. She opened the coat and showed me a very thin, threadbare little dress.

"This is all I've got," she said. "I have pawned everything else, and I haven't had a thing to eat to-day."

But she wouldn't sell the fur coat—for the sake of appearance.

So we went into Gatti's and ordered the largest steak we could buy.

These were the girls who failed.

How wonderful for me that I was given the intelligence to realize in time that I was drifting on to the rocks and neglecting opportunities, and that I had the strength during those weeks of convalescence to realize the situation and to make my decision ! It was a lot to give up, especially as I had been offered an extra pound or two in salary, but I had the sense to know that my success in the future depended on myself—that individual effort is the only thing that counts. I began to read Shakespeare again ; the old love of acting reasserted itself, and ambition leapt in my heart like the flames of the Phoenix. It was stronger and more vital than ever. For months I had not done any work at all, I had got into the habit of merely dressing myself and going out to lunch and supper parties, and battenning on admiration and pleasure, but now I knew I must turn my back on all that and perhaps face poverty again : there must be no compromise.

I told my mother that I would never go back to the Gaiety, much as I loved it. She, I think, was a little disappointed and thought me very foolish, but she did not attempt to interfere ; so I wrote my letter and resigned. It was a tremendous wrench leaving all my friends and the kindness and generosity I had received in that theatre. Mr. Edwardes thought me ungrateful and very stupid to give up a comfortable living and a certain engagement for the will-o'-the-wisp I chose to follow ; for at that time I had shown no particular talent and was just a person who decorated the stage. However, I stuck to my resolution and, having burnt my boats, set about beginning my new career. It was hard to discipline myself, to refuse all my parties and invitations and to take up serious study. Also, my illness had cost a good deal one way and another, and there was very little to fall back on. I dreaded being poor again. I hadn't minded it when I was very young, because I

hadn't known the difference ; but, having tasted luxury and got into expensive habits, I had a horror of the indignity of being very poor.

Again the tramp to the agents ; but by this time I was more or less of a celebrity, and within a fortnight I got my first serious part in a play called " Tommy Atkins "—at the Duke of York's I think it was. We rehearsed for four weeks, and the play ran a fortnight ! Then again out of work—more struggles. Another engagement—and the play was withdrawn at the end of the week !

By this time most of my presents and my few jewels had been pledged, and Mother and I lived on the proceeds ; but I had very few things, so the " proceeds " did not go very far. I hated to give up my few trinkets, and, alas, they have never been redeemed ; but I stuck to my diamond heart, and have it to this day. After that I went on a long provincial tour—a second company, to gain experience. It did me no good at all ; the part was bad, and so were the actors, and I learnt nothing. Sitting in my dismal room in the provinces, haggling over landladies' bills at the end of the week, the cold long journeys—how I hated it all ! In my babyhood days there had been a certain amount of excitement, but now the glamour was gone and I longed for the warm comfort of the Gaiety ! But I was too proud to go back and admit myself beaten. Mr. Edwardes sent for me about this time and offered me a small rise in salary if I would return. But I was determined that I would stick to my career and do or die in the attempt.

But no engagement came, and I began to despair. It was a serious business finding three meals a day for the family. I knew one or two artists, and one of them suggested to me one day that I should sit for him and be paid. I was only too delighted at the chance of making a little money. My friend was not very rich either, and used to pay me six shillings a morning. The money was put discreetly on the mantelpiece, and I used to collect it as I went out, and everybody pretended not to notice.



My friend was a brilliant painter, but very eccentric. He would have been famous indeed, but he had a complex about selling his pictures. If anybody suggested buying them, he took it as an insult, and said he was sure they could not possibly appreciate his beautiful work. This kept him poor, and he shared a little studio in Kensington with three friends. They each had a corner with their own models sitting before their easels, and it was understood that nobody took the slightest notice of the others; there was a great pretence of being quite alone in the room. No talking was permitted, and no introductions. I knew the other three models so well by sight and sat with them for weeks, but never spoke to them in my life.

It was very tiring sitting hour after hour, but I was a very good model and got lots of work. I sat for many well-known artists, as nothing seemed to be available in the way of a part and I was determined that I would not go back to the Gaiety. I knew that, if I did, I should sink into complacency and never do anything at all.

Many of the famous pictures that are sold to-day and fetch big prices I sat for as a paid model when I was a girl. I was Solomon J. Solomon's model, Byam Shaw's, and Sir Frederick Leighton put me in one of his pictures when I was a child and I used to sit to classes, male and female.

There is a curious impersonal feeling between an artist and his model. I so understand the story of the artist's model who was sitting to a class of male students in the "altogether" when she suddenly looked up at the skylight and saw a workman mending the roof.

"Oh," she cried, seizing a bit of drapery, "there's a man!"

A charming episode happened to me about this time. Charles Conder, whom I had met but had not at that time sat to (although, in later years, he painted me a good deal), asked a party of us to go to a dance. I think it was the Slade School dance, but I cannot be quite sure. Anyway, it was to do with one of the big painting schools.



We were all to be in fancy dress, but I had nothing, so we made a white dress out of book muslin for me, and I had a pink sash. It looked very anæmic when it was finished, and I remember I told Conder about it a few days before the party. He said :

“Give it to me and it shall be the smartest dress in the room.”

So he painted the dress for me, and the sash ribbons. It was lovely, and the success of the evening. I have the sash ribbons still—they are framed and hang in my room—but the paint broke off the common butter muslin of the gown itself, and it is no more.

The memory of that dress is almost as tender to me as my first evening frock.

## CHAPTER VIII

**T**HEN I got a little part in "The Sign of the Cross," which they had received at the Lyric. Maud Jeffries was playing Mercia. She was a beautiful woman and a charming actress. Wilson Barrett was a short, rather thick-set man, well past middle age. He wore high-heeled boots to make him taller, but he was the matinée idol of the day. They all seemed wonderful to me, however, and I adored the play. I watched the acting every moment from the wings and through peep-holes in the scenery until I knew every word of the parts by heart. Then, one day, Miss Jeffries was taken ill during the matinée and could not play the evening performance. The first understudy had been sent away a week before to take up a part in the touring company and the second understudy did not know her lines, so I begged Mr. Barrett to let me go on. He did—and I played Mercia for the two weeks until Miss Jeffries came back. But I was not very happy at the Lyric, so I left.

More weeks of uncertainty, wavering between regrets at having thrown up my part and determination that I would find more congenial work; the play and the acting at the Lyric were old-fashioned and it wasn't the kind of work I wanted to do. It was the evolution of the drama—just as it occurs to-day. There were new styles of plays being written and I wanted to get to the more modern colloquial work.

Then the Goddess of Chance stepped in again. My days on the river were few and far between; I could not afford special clothes for any one particular thing, and I

refused all invitations because to be well and suitably dressed for every occasion, however simply, is a very expensive business. But, for once, I did accept an invitation to spend the day on the river with some friends in a punt. My mother thought it would be good for me; it was in the height of summer, about the middle of August, and the London streets, especially in Kennington, smelt of decayed vegetables and all the musty odours of the sun-baked earth.

We could not afford a holiday, and the hot and depressing months faced us. I was so pale and languid that my mother feared I should be ill again, and begged me to go.

It was a glorious morning when I started, and we drifted along the reach at Maidenhead, past the villas with their lawns and flowers, and had our lunch under the drooping trees—not the luxury of my Gaiety Girl launch days, but simple happy enjoyment. It was such a wonderful day, and everything looked so beautiful that my spirits revived, and I thought of nothing but the pleasure of the moment; all imaginings of disaster and dread of the future passed out of my mind—I forgot the stuffy days in London, the search for work, the disappointments and failure. I was gay and light-hearted and in the best of looks.

I was not very expert with a punt-pole, but could help out, and, when my turn came, I was willing to do my share of the day's labours while the others lay on the cushions. The stream was very high and the punt very wayward, and my face very red. My hair hung down in wisps, but it was curly and becoming—my blouse and skirt were soaked, and I had taken off my shoes and stockings that I might get a firmer grip of the punt. I suppose I must have looked rather picturesque for we passed some people in another boat among whom was H. V. Esmond. He knew one of my friends, and they called greetings to each other. Then he said to me:

“Young woman, you look exactly like the gipsy girl in my new play—can you act?”

I was very modest in my reply, but my friends explained to him how I had given up the Gaiety in order to make a serious career for myself, and eventually it was arranged that I should go down to the theatre where he had already started rehearsing and give a reading of the part. I could not believe it was true. It seemed like a dream, the glorious afternoon, with this magnificent prospect suddenly opening out before me—a chance in a hundred, for Mr. Esmond was the popular dramatist of the moment and very modern and progressive.

It was delightful to get home in the evening and tell my mother of this great opportunity and the possibilities it held out.

I went to rehearsal, and Mr. Esmond worked very hard with me for a few days, and at the end of that time gave me the contract for the part. It was a delightful piece; his wife, Eva Moore, was playing the leading woman's part and Charles Hawtrey was the star—and I played the "Gipsy Girl"—I had my first success in "One Summer's Day." It was a very picturesque part, full of character, and the critics gave me splendid notices. In all my triumphs at the Gaiety I had never risen to the dignity of being noticed by the Press, and the excitement of reading the papers and seeing my name in print was overwhelming. We bought a press-cutting book and Mother and I spent our time sticking in my notices—the pleasure it gave us! I insisted on having the book on a little table beside my bed and would read my notices over to myself before I went to sleep for months afterwards.

My association with the Esmonds opened up a new and delightful life to me. I was admitted to the intimate circle of their friends. They had a lovely place on a hill a few miles away from the river, called Apple Porch, and on Sundays it was crowded with the most intelligent and brilliant of the writers, artists and actors of that time—most of them young, most of them poor, but all very

enthusiastic—Ethel Barrymore, Gerald du Maurier, Henry Ainley, Suzanne and Elizabeth Sheldon, Julie Opp, Robert Loraine, H. B. Irving—to name only a few of them. Some of them had already gained fame, some were at the beginning of their careers and full of ambition. After a hard day's exercise on the river or at tennis or golf, the conversation round the supper table, on Sunday nights, was lively, to say the least, and sometimes brilliant. Each of us had our own particular point of view, and we were all young and egotistical. There were tremendous and vital arguments, clashes of opinion, quarrels and makings-up, and, ever, the smiling face of Eva Moore and the charming fantastic imagination of H. V. Esmond to keep us in order. He was incurably romantic, with an exquisite mind attuned to all beauty.

It was a great privilege for me to be admitted into this coterie, as the necessary credentials were humour and intelligence, and, incidentally, the standard of looks was remarkably high. All of us were healthy and young and vital, with work to do. What wonderful times we had! Everybody got engaged to everybody else on those week-ends. The engagements generally lasted about three or four weeks, but who could help falling in love—proximity, and the moon, that heavenly garden, and youth!

What did money matter? There was no such thing. This amazed me. I had come from a school where money reigned supreme, and woman's success was counted by her worldly possessions and her jewels. Here money was forgotten, and only achievement counted. I remember three of the loveliest girls—one of them now a great star on the American stage—had one evening dress between them. They used to draw lots as to who should wear it, and the triumphant one went out for the evening and the other two stayed at home.

How different from the Gaiety was this new life and what a tremendous change for me! It was not nearly so luxurious, but so much gayer, so much more care-free,

with that glittering will-o'-the-wisp—success—dancing ahead of me. Success—at last!—and the wonderful prospect of the future. All my old love of the theatre returned and I longed to achieve my greatest wish and play the Shakespearean heroines.



## CHAPTER IX

I BEGAN to get on after that, and had a great many offers. Then Charles Hawtrey put me into a comedy called "The Cuckoo," and I played a very funny part. I was only on the stage for half an hour and on the first night the audience laughed a good deal. I changed my clothes and went to my dressing-room, as I was finished after the second act, but I waited until the final curtain to hear how the play went and, to my utter amazement, I heard the audience calling for me. I rushed downstairs and shut myself in my dressing-room, and refused to come out. Charles Hawtrey came down to the room and knocked at the door, and insisted on bringing me up in my rather shabby coat and skirt to take my first great "call."

It was the most marvellous thrill. It was particularly wonderful to me as it was so entirely unexpected by myself or by the company. The part had seemed quite a tiny one at rehearsal and we did not think it was going to make such a hit. Nobody knows how wonderful it is to hear oneself called personally, by name, by an audience, for the first time.

When, in the last few years, I left my serious parts and made a success in comedy, some people thought I had turned a complete somersault; but, as a matter of fact, I played comedy before I began my "tragic" career. I always had the profile of a tragedienne, therefore it was difficult for people to realize that I had a sense of humour. As Herbert Tree said many years later, "You don't expect a sense of humour in a passion-flower."

By this time I was quite a personage, and during the

run of "The Cuckoo" I had made such a good success that Augustin Daly, of the famous Daly company, who was then in London, came to see me with a view to taking me back to play in his company in America. Negotiations were well on the way, but he got pneumonia and died during that visit. So I remained in England. After that I went to the Haymarket Theatre to play in "The School for Scandal," and then to the St. James's in a play called "The Conquerors" with Miss Julia Neilson and Sir (then Mr.) George Alexander.

I had a splendid dramatic part and a terrific quarrel scene with H. B. Irving. He had to break a bottle over my head in the course of this scene, and so realistic was he that I was in danger of my life. When he was acting he forgot all about me and only thought of the situation. The bottle just missed me and smashed upon the table. I was so young and so overawed at being in association with such a magnificent company that I did not dare say a word. Night after night I dreaded that bottle when I saw the gleam in his eyes. But at last I got so frightened that I had to tell the stage manager. He went to Mr. Irving and suggested some other business. Mr. Irving, who, off the stage, was the gentlest of men, was horrified when he realized, and I had the largest box of chocolates imaginable and some flowers by way of an apology.

Then I went to play with dear Julia Neilson and Fred Terry in their first venture together in management in "Sweet Nell of Old Drury." This was one of the happiest of my recollections. I played the part of Lady Castlemaine. It was a most exciting time.

Julia Neilson and Fred Terry had taken the Haymarket Theatre. It was their first managerial venture, two people starting out on a great adventure. All the company adored them—Julia Neilson with her wonderful beauty and gentleness, Fred Terry with his explosions and kind-heartedness, and the irresistible Terry charm. If he got into a temper (and he got into lots of them) it was over in five minutes. and he was more of a Terry than ever ;

and, as everybody knows, no one can stand up against any of the Terry family. There is something of the siren about them all. Any member of the company would have done anything on earth for those two in management for the first time, and I think the feeling of goodwill and the desire for their success was so strong that it carried over to the audience on the first night, plus the play, and started the Terrys out on their wildly successful career.

I was not quite twenty then, and I remember what a terrific adventure the starting in that management was to me. The play wasn't by any means complete at rehearsal, and I should think by the time it was produced there were very few of the original scenes left at all.

Hartley Manners, a poor, rather shabby but charming dramatist, not very successful in those days, did most of the rewriting, and day after day we had to study new scenes on bits of paper, and new situations. He knew instinctively what the public wanted. I cannot remember who the original authors were, but Hartley Manners was certainly responsible for half, or at least a third, of the success of "Sweet Nell."

After rehearsals Mr. Manners and I used to go and sit in Hyde Park to get some air and talk over the theatre and its wonderful possibilities. I longed to be a great actress. He was full of ambition to have his plays produced. He would read them aloud to me as we sat under the trees on the little green chairs we had hired for twopence. Our hope and ambition were undaunted. Every play he read was a masterpiece, and I was to have a wonderful part in all of them and show the world what I could do. We had no money and there was very little chance of the plays going on, but our hopes were unbounded.

I remember one incident. I had a collie dog called Blanco. She was white and very unusual. She had been trained by a shepherd in Scotland and given to me as a great surprise by one of my friends. I was extremely

proud of her, and she adored me. And I remember, as Jack Manners and I were sitting under the trees one afternoon, and he was reading a most dramatic scene, I looked up to find myself surrounded by sooty, bleating sheep! My collie had collected and herded all the sheep in Hyde Park and brought them to me, as I was her mistress and she thought they belonged to me. The look of surprise and horror on the faces of the sheep was remarkable. They had grazed there in pleasant obscurity for many weeks, and were very old and dirty. Suddenly they had been made to leap fences and tear across the grass, pursued by my dog. On the heels of the sheep came the keepers, and we had a dreadful scene, but the matter was straightened out and I led my beautiful Blanco home in disgrace.

I never heard the end of Mr. Manners' play, although it was called "Peg o' my Heart" and was about Peg Woffington and David Garrick. He took the title, many years after, and used it for another play—I suppose one of the most successful plays that have ever been written.

Then came the first night of "Sweet Nell." It was a wonderful first night, with most terrific enthusiasm, and I suppose now there is hardly a member of the public in England who has not seen the play. It was a rare thing to start in management with such a colossal success, and the play has been the foundation stone of Julia Neilson and Fred Terry's management through all these years.

By this time my eye was fixed on His Majesty's Theatre, and at last, after many rebuffs, I got an interview with Herbert Tree.<sup>1</sup>

I shall never forget my terror when I went to see him. I was shown into his sitting-room at the theatre. Every detail of that room is printed on my brain. There was a bright fire burning, and a tall fender with a seat round it, and the fire gleamed through the bars. It was all very warm and cosy and friendly. Then Herbert Tree entered.

<sup>1</sup> The name of Her Majesty's Theatre was changed to His Majesty's during the reign of King Edward, on January 22nd, 1901, and Herbert Tree received his knighthood on June 24th, 1909.

The author inserts this note to save confusion when referring to Herbert Tree and the theatre.

He was a tall, fair, slender man with the bluest eyes I have ever seen, and a manner of extreme eccentricity which I afterwards found, when I got to know him well, was merely an armour he assumed to guard himself against the world. I have seen him put it on and take it off very often in the years that followed. He was quite conscious of it himself, and quite aware of the tremendous value and protection it was to him. On this occasion he was armed to the hilt. I was his prey—a young actress, terrified out of my life at meeting the great man. I remember I had a green bird in my hat, and as he talked to me my head was slightly bent, and he stroked the bird continuously. I did not dare raise my head, but sat in a fixed attitude, frightened out of my wits, incapable of speech or all the magnificent things I wished to say to him, and so thankful when the interview was finally over that I flew out of the theatre.

That was my first encounter with Herbert Tree. He deliberately did that, wickedly enjoying the joke, knowing all the time he was making me nervous and laughing at me behind it all.

I did not meet him for some considerable time after that, and thought I had not made the slightest impression on him.

Then I joined Nat Goodwin and Maxine Elliott to play in a new play called "When We were Twenty-One," written by H. V. Esmond. In this, far from being a care-free gipsy girl, I was a vamp of the night-clubs, with the reddest possible wig. I had to wear a red wig because Miss Elliott was also very dark, and it would not have done for us both to be on the stage with the same coloured heads.

Miss Elliott's beauty at that time was positively startling. She occasionally took me to lunch with her in restaurants, and people used to turn round and look after her.

There were the most wonderful-looking women at the leading theatres at that time—Lily Hanbury, Julia



Neilson and Maxine Elliott, all playing on the London stage together.

I was afraid I was not very good as the vamp, for the red wig was extremely unbecoming to me—wigs always have been.

During the run of "When We were Twenty-One" they were preparing across the road at His Majesty's for Stephen Phillips' "Ulysses." There had been a great deal of gossip about this production—as there always was over anything Herbert Tree did. One heard of the three great women's parts, and everybody wondered who the stars would be that would play them. Eventually Mrs. Brown-Potter was chosen for Calypso, the Siren of the Magic Isle, and Lily Hanbury, the established leading lady of His Majesty's at that time, was to play either Pallas Athene or Penelope. This had not yet been decided. Everybody in the theatre world knew about it all, and wondered and thought who the third star would be that would be chosen. It seemed such a far-away hope for any of us younger actresses to get the chance.

One night, at the Comedy, I received a little note from His Majesty's Theatre asking me to come and see Sir Herbert again. It was over a year since our famous interview, and as I came into the room he said :

"Where's that bird ? "

I thought he had forgotten all about me, but he was the most observant person in the world and made a mental note of the particular characteristic of everybody with whom he came into contact.

We never know when we stand upon the threshold of a great event. At last the real turn of fortune had come.

Herbert Tree gazed at me for a long time without saying a word. He had a curious habit of staring straight at a person and then saying "Yes" very slowly—or "No," as it might be—as if he were answering a mental question he had asked himself. He looked and looked at me without saying a word, and I felt I could hear a clock ticking somewhere ; but I suppose it was my heart



beating. That terrible feeling of paralysis was creeping over me again. His eyes seemed to pierce me like a gimlet.

Presently he spoke, and asked if I had ever played in blank verse, and, although I knew Shakespeare so well, I had to confess that I had not done anything since I was four years old, when I was the fairy Peaseblossom in "A Midsummer Night's Dream"; but as I had only three words to say in that production it did not carry me far as a classical actress. And so, stumbingly, I admitted to him—I was too inarticulate to explain properly—that I had not played any part in blank verse. I knew as I spoke I was pronouncing my death sentence. The very chance I had waited for so long was slipping away from me and would never come back again. I longed to understudy in that wonderful theatre, and I thought he needed me for some small part or other; but, without offering any explanation, he said:

"Oh, then it's impossible. Good morning, Miss Collier."

And again I went away in utter bewilderment. He gave me no idea of what was in his mind, and I could not imagine why I had been sent for in that urgent way, just the one question put to me, and then dismissed.

I worried about it for about a week. Again a call from His Majesty's. It was late in the evening, and as I finished early in the play I hurried out of the theatre and went across. Sir Herbert was on the stage, and presently he came into his room. Again that piercing look and that awful, awful pause, and then he said:

"It's a pity you have never played in blank verse, because it's impossible."

I could not bear again that ignominious exit and that cryptic remark, so I plucked up courage to ask him what he meant. He said:

"I've been thinking of you for one of the parts in my new production of Stephen Phillips' play, 'Ulysses'; but, if you have never played blank verse, it's impossible. Good evening, Miss Collier."

This was the third time—and I was desperate. The tears came into my eyes, and I begged him to let me read one scene and to give me a chance. He was adamant at first, but desperation gave me extra courage, and I implored him to hear me for five minutes. His call came to go upon the stage, and, perhaps out of pity, or irritation at my persistence, he said :

“ Well, you can wait until the end of the play. They’ll give you a seat. Come round at the finish.”

I did so. I hardly saw what they were doing on the stage—I was so anxious to know what was going to happen to me. At the end of the play I went back to his little room again. It gradually became full of people of every sort trying to get hold of him—personal friends from the front, business managers, actors, authors, telephones, messengers with notes. I stood in a corner feeling utterly lost. It seemed that he had entirely forgotten about the reading that was to be. I was in despair. How was it possible for him to concentrate on a thing that was of so little consequence to him but of such profound importance to me ? I heard him accept an invitation to supper. My heart sank. That was the end. He’d go away and forget me altogether. His friends said they would wait until he had changed. Mr. Dana, his manager, wanted him to attend to some urgent business, and they disappeared together into his dressing-room beyond to take his make-up off and change his clothes. He talked to his friends through the door about all sorts of trivial things—never a mention of me or a reference to me. Presently, after everybody had chatted about everything under the sun, and I had stood silently by thinking I was forgotten and wondering how I had better go, he emerged from the inner room spick and span, his hair brushed very smooth, a script in his hand :

“ Come along, Miss Collier,” he said.

I came forward with a very red, shy face. He took my arm. We left amazed and blank faces—everybody impatient that he should give them his attention. His

friends, with whom he was going to supper, irritated at the delay. But he ignored them all, and we went along to the silent foyer. It was the great foyer that everybody knows at His Majesty's. It was in darkness. He had a light turned on and, amid the gloomy shadows, told me to stand at the other end. He put the script into my hand, and in that dim and dreary light, in the echoing silence, I began to read to him a scene from "Ulysses." I read very badly. My voice sounded thin and squeaky with nerves. The words were long and difficult, and there was a tremendous number of Greek names. Suddenly he said :

"That will do," and stared and stared at me without saying anything more. Then that awful reiteration, "It's a pity you haven't played blank verse before. Good evening, Miss Collier."

I turned away thinking all was over, and just as I was going down the stairs he said :

"Come to rehearsal to-morrow afternoon. Be in the dress circle."

How wonderful ! My spirits revived. I thought if he wanted me at rehearsal he might let me have an understudy of one of the parts, but that was almost too much to hope for.

We smartened up my clothes—my mother and I. I remember I had a little brown dress which trailed slightly at the back on the floor, with a fur collar to it, that had seen me through many seasons, but always added a touch to any garment we put it on.

I arrived at the theatre at about twelve o'clock. Never shall I forget my excitement as I went through the stage door of His Majesty's Theatre for the first time as a tentative member of the company. Strange how events happen—and we pass them by. Something ought to have told me that I was crossing the threshold of a new world—a world that was to mean to me, in the future, the happiest and most successful time in my life.

## CHAPTER V

I FOUND my way to the dress circle. I sat there entranced. I was all alone and it was pitch-dark, but the stage was brightly lighted, and there before me were some of the biggest "stars" in London, rehearsing. It was a magic scene—at least to me. I had been to performances at His Majesty's of course and knew all these people well by sight. I had never been behind the scenes. I had never seen the great Beerbohm Tree at work. Beautiful Lily Hanbury was there, and Mrs. Brown-Potter and Stephen Phillips and Sidney Colvin, and a number of others whose names had been mythical to me. There were about a hundred people, I should think, with the walkers-on. It was all overwhelming and inspiring to see them all working and Sir Herbert directing.

They had been at it for about three weeks, and everybody knew more or less what they were doing. I watched and watched enthralled, there alone in the blackness, quite forgotten by everybody.

Lunch-time came. Mr. Tree had his inevitable egg and a piece of bread and butter brought to him, which I was to know so well in the future. It was put on the prompt table. He never ate the egg; he just cracked it. Everybody in the company swore it was a property egg, for it came regularly to every rehearsal, or one like it, and he just cracked the top and left it. He was too interested to eat. Others had chops sent in; some had buns and milk, and some rushed over to the little shop facing the stage door for a glass of milk and a cake, and ate them on the run if they were wanted for a scene. Nobody

stopped work or had the hour and a half off as they do nowadays. I always think it a pity, as it takes them out of the atmosphere. The personalities who were working together kept in touch with each other, and the spirit of rehearsal was not broken.

The lunch hour went by. Still I sat in the circle. I had had nothing to eat, and by about four o'clock I was hungry and faint with excitement. I saw the rehearsal suddenly stop and the four great ones—Stephen Phillips, Lily Hanbury, Herbert Tree and Sidney Colvin—retire into a corner to discuss some question. I learnt later it was the decision Miss Hanbury was to make as to whether she would play the part of Penelope or Pallas Athene. She was equally suited to both, but obviously could not play both, and there was no one else they could think of to assume the rôle she abandoned; but they could not cut her in half, so she was allowed to choose.

Everybody stood about waiting. The discussion went on for about half an hour. Eventually some decision must have been taken, and Herbert Tree turned and spoke into the empty theatre, trying to peer into the darkness with his hand shading his eyes, and said:

“Is a Miss Collier up in the circle? Will she kindly come down upon the stage?”

I nearly fainted. I had entirely forgotten I might be called upon. How I got down the narrow stairs from the pass-door and on to that great stage, blinking in the sudden light after the darkness, my knees shaking under me with nervousness, I shall never know. Plainly dressed in my humble brown frock, pale with fear, with every eye upon me, I walked into the midst of the great ones.

Sir Herbert introduced me to Miss Hanbury—who was later to be my best friend—Stephen Phillips, Sidney Colvin and Mrs. Brown-Potter. Then he said:

“Here, take this script and read some of the part.”

I shall never forget my horror and terror. I never dreamt he would want me for one of the leading rôles. I thought at most it would mean an understudy or a



fairly small part. But I had to do it. I could not refuse. And there, in front of that whole company, I had to read the most difficult scene in the whole play—the scene outside Hell where Ulysses talks to Pallas Athene. I stumbled and stuttered over the awful Greek names, and I thought I heard giggles from the people who were standing around me. It was really imagination, for they were extremely kind though a little resentful of a stranger being suddenly called in when they had been rehearsing the play for three weeks. The poor girl who had been reading the part naturally received a great deal of sympathy from the members of the company, who rather looked on me as an intruder.

I thought the scene would never come to an end. I should have liked to throw myself on the floor and sob, but I held on, and presently my unfortunate exhibition was over. I could not raise my eyes from the script, I was so terrified, and a few tears dropped down on it. Nobody spoke, and at last Stephen Phillips said :

“ Well, at least she has the profile for it.”

And they gave me the part of Pallas Athene. That was my beginning at His Majesty's. It was the greatest chance a young actress ever had. It was a part that ran through the entire gamut—the part of a glorified fairy queen protecting the hero on every occasion, with the most exquisite lines to speak, the most gorgeous dress with a great golden helmet and a huge spear, very becoming to my particular type of looks ; and, as if that wasn't enough, the part wound up with a delicious scene of comedy where Pallas Athene disguises herself as a young goatherd and is dressed in a leopard skin. The sudden contrast of this after the armour and helmet and great spear can be imagined. It was bound to make a success.

During rehearsals nobody took very much notice of me, as I was a kind of runner-up to the great ones. Sir Herbert was too busy with the production, and he did not take much trouble over teaching me to act. I do



remember, though, at the first dress rehearsal there was a big flight of stairs to walk up in my long dress and my spear and my helmet, and he said :

“Isn’t it possible to go up those stairs a little more gracefully than that ? ”

It pulled me together with a jerk. I studied that walk desperately, and as we had five or six dress rehearsals I used to get there early and practise ; I had plenty of opportunity of going up and down the steps. It sounds a trivial thing, but that walk was a great part of my success as Pallas Athene. My performance would have been entirely spoilt if I had stumbled or looked awkward, and in my notices I got special commendation for my goddess-like ascent of that flight of stairs.

The dress rehearsals were wonderful and thrilling, full of exciting contretemps, and conducted amid the most extraordinary confusion. It was amazing that Herbert Tree could keep all the points he intended to bring out in his head at the same time. As the enormous sets and scenes were put up, one after another, it seemed as if they could never be moved in the two minutes’ darkness that was allowed for the changes. The lighting took hours ; music had to be arranged ; every gesture and word and movement of the actors thought out by that one brain. He did everything himself and ran his own huge theatre down to the last detail.

The play was very long. The chief scene I remember was where I stood before the Gate of Hell as the Goddess giving Ulysses the word that was to carry him through Hades. It was the scene I had to read before the company, and every word was seared into my brain. We were silhouetted against black velvet, on which the rocks were painted. It was the simplest scene, but a magnificent effect from the front. Then it changed and disclosed a great flight of steps from the flies to the floor by which Ulysses went down to the depths of Hell, the ghosts sighing to him and trying to hinder his descent. I shall never forget the weird beauty of this scene.

There were also three wonderful tableaux which Ulysses was supposed to see in a vision ; but the play was very long, and the managers tried to persuade him to cut them out. But he was determined to keep them in. They were not necessary to the play and cost a great deal of money. The first tableau was Tantalus with the grapes that he could never reach ; the second was Sisyphus and the stone he could not move ; the third was Prometheus bound to the rock with a huge bird plucking at his heart. The tableaux cost several hundred pounds to put on, but so little did Herbert Tree think of money that, against everybody's wish, he insisted on having them, although it would have been an enormous saving of expense and time to do without them.

Funny little things happened too. Herbert Tree took strange likes and dislikes to members of the company, and in the last tableau of all there was a young Swedish actor whom most of us thought extremely stupid, but who Sir Herbert was convinced had undiscovered talent. He was a young gentleman who gave forth wild views on every subject and would discuss acting by the hour. We were all very bored with him, but Sir Herbert believed in him. His great chance was to come in the tableau of Prometheus bound to the rock with the great bird plucking at his heart ! The scene was most dramatic. The dress rehearsal began. The three tableaux which were the joy of Sir Herbert's heart were to be tried at last.

The first one started. The curtain went up. Tantalus stood there, in a tragic attitude, reaching out for the grapes. He was of course supposed not to catch them, but they descended obligingly into his hands. They were worked by an electric contrivance from the flies, and as the man who worked them could neither see the actor nor hear the cries he just wound them up and down regardless of the action on the stage. Poor Tantalus crouched down to avoid them, and up they were dragged into the flies. He sprang forward to reach them—and they descended again into his hands. This went on for

about half an hour, Mr. Tree getting livid and abusing the actor, who could not it seemed under any condition avoid the grapes. Tree, in a fury, decided to cut it out and insisted on going on to the next tableau.

This was Sisyphus, the gentleman who tried to push the stone up a hill, his punishment being that he could never move it. But, alas, the stone was made of cardboard, and, as the actor was not a very good one, every time he pushed he managed to jerk the stone in his anxiety to please. He got worse and worse every time he tried, and Sir Herbert, by this time, was almost apoplectic with temper, and frightened the poor man so much that his foot caught in a bit of the scenery, and he fell off the rostrum and disappeared from sight on the other side. And so the curtain descended on an empty stage and no Sisyphus at all.

Then came the final tableau of Prometheus bound to the rock, and there was his protégé, the young gentleman we all detested, lying on the rock half-naked with one side of his body blood-stained and torn, and the great property bird descending and plucking at his heart. He really looked wonderful, and Tree's face beamed with delight at the success of the tableau, when suddenly the young gentleman sat up on the rock and said :

"Pardon me, do I take any notice of the bird ?"

Tree dashed out of the theatre. The three tableaux were cut out and never heard of again.

The first scene of the play was on Mount Olympus. I came up the trap from the earth below and had to speak the first lines of the play. You can imagine the responsibility and anxiety of it.

I had an overwhelming success on the first night. I shall never forget it. Nothing that has ever come to me since has been in the least like the sensation of that wonderful night. And at the end, when I had been called specially, my dear Lily Hanbury put her arms round my shoulders and kissed me and took me to my room. Tree was wonderful to me, and told me that I was to

have a long contract with him and my fortune was made. I was established in the first theatre in London. Amid all the glamour, all the excitement, my first real taste of adulation and flattery, there was one face I longed to see—one face I loved so well, with big brown eyes and black, black hair. I wanted to see her expression so much because I knew her joy would be greater than mine, for at last I had reached the height of her ambition for me—His Majesty's Theatre.

She had not come round during the performance—we had agreed we could not stand it. I went upstairs to the dressing-room, and there she was, sitting in a big chair, much too large for her, a tiny little figure, rather insignificant, and with those wonderful eyes, the tears dropping slowly out of them. But she was smiling. We didn't say anything to each other, but I knelt down beside her and put my head in her lap. I felt her dear hands on my head, and she bent over me and said :

“Darling, thank you for the elephant.”

We didn't need any other words. All was fulfilled for her—she was content.

I suppose no human being was ever so proud as she, and my joy frankly was for the happiness I gave her and because I had been able to achieve what I had set out to do—take her “over the water” and give her that elephant.

It was a magic time, and as a perfume or a melody brings back the past—the nostalgia of youth—so any little bit of music that was played in “Ulysses” or any quotation of a line from it thrills me and fills my heart with happy memories. I have a programme of “Ulysses” that I would not part with for the wealth of the Indies. The dear and silly sentiment of treasured souvenirs !

## CHAPTER XI

**H**IS MAJESTY'S was wonderful in those days. Everybody was a star in their own particular line, yet nobody asserted themselves or made scenes, and the object of them all was the success of the play. And the head of this magnificent company was the fantastic and commanding personality of Herbert Tree.

How can I describe him? That tall, thin, graceful figure with the long, slender hands—the most expressive hands in the world. He used them incessantly. The bluest eyes I have ever seen; the rest of his face literally sand-colour. He used to say that the reason he put on such wonderful make-ups was that his face was like a piece of canvas on which he could paint his own designs. His hair wasn't gold—it was lemon-colour, and rather scanty. He had a curious humorous mouth that turned up at the corners, and he usually stood with one knee bent inward, rather in the Greek attitude. He was the strangest blend of terrific power and childishness. Out of the theatre he was a boy; in the theatre he dominated everybody. He was absolutely relentless—but everybody adored him. He never seemed to want to rest at all. At the dress rehearsals he would keep us up till five or six in the morning, and the men at their posts on the lime-lights would drop off to sleep, and the actors would lie about in the circle or in the boxes. Tree would disappear for hours to have supper or talk over some problem of the play, and return at three or four in the morning. The limelight men would spring to attention, the actors rush down on the stage, full of apologies for daring even to feel sleepy in his presence. And he would be as bright



and energetic as ever, with an eye for every detail, every spark of light, every intonation of an actor's voice, infinitely patient when he knew he was getting response, terribly irritated by stupidity of any sort.

The rehearsals at His Majesty's seemed chaotic, but Herbert Tree did not believe in order or form. When some careful pedantic stage manager tried to edit that strange mind of his by keeping a timed schedule of rehearsals and appointments, Herbert Tree would say: "What's the good? Out of chaos sprang the Phoenix."

And he was invariably right. Some of the greatest effects in the theatre are accidental. Inspiration seems to have departed with the advent of the well-ordered and organized stage unions.

Tree had no skill in music whatever, and yet he could hum, without a note in his voice, the exact melody he needed for a particular scene. And from the strange noises he emitted in front of an orchestra full of musicians, without the slightest self-consciousness, before his whole company (I am ashamed to say a lot of us giggled) Coleridge Taylor and the other composers would understand exactly what he meant, and would write a magnificent march or interlude exactly suited to the particular scene.

He had a marvellous sense of fun and would play like a boy little childish games. This is a very rare gift of humour—at least I think so—the kind of humour I like best—laughter with no malice in it. As Tree said: "Humour is the love-child of intelligence," and humour should be loving and kindly. There are three kinds of humour—a sense of fun, a sense of wit, and a sense of satire. Tree had all three, but his sense of fun and fantasy was abnormal. He had fairies in his brain, and the heart of a schoolboy. I have even known him ring door-bells and run away; but, if anybody dared to be presuming, his scathing satire would wither them.

For years he was quoted everywhere. Everybody listened to him. Stories of Tree were all over London.



People exaggerated every word he said, some stupid enough not to realize that a great deal of his vagueness was assumed and that he was perfectly well aware of the sensations he caused in their smaller mentalities.

It may be an odd simile, but Tree conveyed to me something glittering. His vivid wit seemed to sparkle. In his tired and dull moments he was fascinating; when he talked seriously he was profound. He had glimpses of the unknown. He never seemed to read, yet he knew every subject. He was always the best conversationalist at any table if he was with congenial people, and his vocabulary was remarkable. He made the English language sound as beautiful as it really is. I do not mean that his diction was elocutionary or anything of that sort—in fact he spoke rather badly—but he had a lovely and graceful sense of words. He made other people dull and colourless, or coarse and heavy. He did ridiculous things deliberately, but they were never stupidly ridiculous, because behind all his vagueness was that intense and alert mind.

He adored the theatre as no person ever loved it, I should think. He was a gipsy, a vagabond—and a great gentleman. I remember once we went together to a gipsy encampment, and Tree asked one of the gipsies how they decided which way to go, and the man answered :

“ I turn my back to the wind.”

Tree laughed and said :

“ That’s a great philosophy, and one I understand.”

I did not agree with him, for I have never seen a person face wind or storm as Herbert Tree did. He never turned his back to the wind, but went straight into the storm. He was the captain of his ship. When a play was a failure—and that was very rare—he was cheerful and full of good humour. He hated long runs and was always dying to do something new. If a play was succeeding too well and making too much money so that he could not take it off, he was the gloomiest person imaginable because he could not start fresh rehearsals and get to

work on new ideas. He was too vital to do the same thing night after night, and when he had played a part for a few weeks he would begin to tire and get mischievous and slack. He would forget his words; his mind would be crowded with thoughts of the new production. Then there would be frantic people in the wings with his cues chalked on a blackboard in huge letters for him to see, or somebody under the table prompting him, or in the fireplace, or bits of his part, written on paper, would be pinned behind the furniture.

We used to rehearse the plays for two months or so, and about six weeks after we had started, if Herbert Tree knew his words, his performance of the part he was going to portray was brilliant; but from that time on he would go on thinking out extra things and over-elaborating until sometimes on a first night he was too subtle for the public. But to us, playing with him, his acting was full of the most amazing touches.

Strangely enough, although Tree was a very tall man and had a big personality, he was an actor for a small theatre. He had not the heroic mien of the great classic actors, the rolling voice or broad gestures of Waller or Coquelin. His voice was not beautiful in tone, and he had a slight lisp; but behind everything he said was that extreme intelligence, and he used his hands wonderfully. His gestures were small but infinitely significant. I never saw him at the Haymarket, which would have been a much better-sized theatre for his particular gifts. But above all he was a character actor.

His character acting was superb. He was inside the skin of Svengali, Falstaff, Fagin, Demetrius, Malvolio. His performance in "Business is Business" was, I think, the most remarkable I remember. His make-ups were extraordinary. Without using any extra padding, he would paint the lines so accurately for Falstaff that it was the face of a fat man. Svengali was like a hawk, and somehow his blue eyes looked black and gloomy. For that gentle old humbug Demetrius they were round—

and I am forgetting his exquisite Colonel Newcome, the dearest, saintliest face with the kindest and most benevolent eyes you ever saw. Then there was Micawber and dozens of other great character performances that nobody, in my memory, has equalled.

But he loved to play heroic parts. He had not the equipment for Hamlet, the appearance, or the voice, or the gestures, but, behind these disadvantages, his conception of Hamlet—of the mind, the feelings of the unhappy prince—was the finest I remember. Had Herbert Tree's idea of the part had the advantages of the classical equipment, it would have been supreme; but, as it was, it was extremely beautiful to those who studied and watched it carefully, though the public never fully appreciated it. It was the same with Antony and Macbeth and Othello.

Of all his Shakespeare performances on the heroic lines I like best his Richard II. I know I am wrong, but Richard II is to me as beautiful a character as Hamlet. It is very seldom played. In fact, I do not remember any other actor on the London stage who has put it on for a run in my time. Frank Benson played it for an occasional performance in his repertory season, and Henry Baynton. I believe William Poel also produced it for special performances, but on the whole this beautiful play is neglected.

It looks almost as if I were presuming to criticize Herbert Tree. That is not my intention at all; only I think it may be interesting to you to know how his work appealed to me while I was acting with him through those years. We each of us have our own particular point of view, and I analyse my thoughts of his work that you may know how my admiration and respect for him and for his understanding of the theatre grew. He was so much greater than his acting. He loved every brick and board of His Majesty's. Sometimes, after a party, he would go back to the empty theatre and sit for hours watching a lighting or scenic rehearsal alone

in the stalls, in the dark, with just the men working on the stage. It was as if he wanted to plunge back into his natural element to find himself again.

He was not particularly fond of social life—I mean of that life that we of the true theatre look at over the hedge, as it were, and admire profoundly but do not belong to! The theatre has its own particular pride and its own particular aristocracy. Herbert Tree was a Bohemian in the right sense of the word. He loved the world of make-believe and its large conceptions and ideals. He was not equipped for the “great world”; he was not a particular success socially. He did not play cards or golf or shoot. He was not adaptable, and he was difficult to talk to for people who did not know him. I have seen him stand for what seemed hours in front of some elegant dowager until she was paralysed with fright. For instance, I remember introducing him at a dance to a great lady who had wished very much to meet him. He stood in front of her, smiling and gracious; and when my dance was over I went back and found him standing in exactly the same position, with the lady looking like a rabbit fascinated by a snake; and as I sat down beside her she whispered to me:

“For Heaven’s sake, take him away. He has frightened me to death.”

It is so hard to write of His Majesty’s Theatre, for nothing that exists to-day has the slightest resemblance to it. To begin with, it was like winning a diploma to be a permanent member of the His Majesty’s company. You had reached the highest mark in London. There was a discipline in the theatre that was never assertive, and yet was profoundly felt by all of us. Every member of the company, from the highest to the lowest, was a comrade. It was like a great family. Tree never permitted airs and graces. There was none of that terrible star feeling that exists in some cases to-day. I remember

one young lady, when we were on tour, refusing to bow to or acknowledge the girls who were walking-on in the company, and this annoyed and hurt them. In one town, when Sir Herbert was giving a party to the entire company, he did not send her an invitation. This upset her very much, and she went to him to ask why she was left out. His answer was characteristic :

“My dear young lady, do let me take you to lunch—alas, I can’t ask you to the party to-night, as the young ladies of my company would not care to meet you.”

Herbert Tree was an entirely different person out of the theatre. Within it he was the dictator—feared and respected. Although he was extremely kind to me out of the theatre, I was really terrified of him at rehearsals, and would not have presumed on my friendship in any way to address him or make suggestions as many of the girls of to-day do to their producers. And it is still the same with me—I suppose because of that early training. I have that same respect for my director ; I leave myself entirely in his hands. I do not contradict or argue ; I think if a man holds the helm he ought at least to be given the chance of steering his ship. It did not matter at His Majesty’s how great was the success of the individual artists, the theatre remained Tree’s theatre, and his personality permeated every production. It was the same at the St. James’s with George Alexander : the thing that counted was not the artists or the plays—it was the personality of the man who directed the theatre. Great directorship has become old-fashioned, but until it returns and there are great producers again the theatre will continue to have failure after failure. Gerald du Maurier produces success after success because, besides his acting, he is a great director.

Under those conditions it wasn’t such a gamble as it is to-day. The theatres made money, the actors had long engagements, the actor-managers all died rich men. People weren’t ruined in the theatre as they seem to be



to-day. It wasn't a game of baccarat, but a steady money-making concern.

There were no great failures at His Majesty's Theatre, or the St. James's, or under Charles Wyndham and Mary Moore, or with the George Edwardes management at the Gaiety and Daly's. These managers had a settled policy. The public understood them, and even if a play did not have a long run at least they could count on sufficient support to carry them, so that they did not lose on what was considered—for them—a failure. They could run a piece for at least two or three months and get back the cost of the production even if the criticism of that play was adverse. And this was due, I am perfectly certain, to the producers, and to the personality of those great actor-managers who dominated the theatre.



## CHAPTER XII

TO go back to His Majesty's—how can I describe to you the pleasure we all had in getting to rehearsals? And then there was a wonderful list of people. Basil Gill (I think he had the best appearance of any leading man I have ever seen), Lyn Harding, Oscar Asche, Lily Brayton, Lionel Brough, Leon M. Lion, who has since become one of the leading managers of England, were all more or less permanent members of the company—and lots of them playing tiny parts—and hundreds of others whose names I cannot recall, and who have since become stars. It was an amazing school—a sort of incubator or breeding house for actors. The weakest came in there and were turned out strong in their knowledge of the theatre and the art of acting. It was really taken as a serious business, and not as to-day—people chosen only for their personalities. Acting itself was a considered art, and we had to be able to play or give reasonable performances of any kind of part. Boys played old men and had to learn to walk and look and speak like old men. They would never dream of casting parts that way these days. A man of fifty has to be a man of fifty, and a girl of eighteen must not be older than twenty. It gains in a certain reality, but loses on the artistic part of the achievement, and is not nearly as amusing as seeing actors play totally different kinds of rôles. It was hard work, but everybody was gay. We made our friendships in the theatre. In fact, we had very little other life, as we used to rehearse in the morning and play at night. Tree believed in long rehearsals,

and this meant that about a month or six weeks after a play was produced we started the first rehearsals for the piece to succeed it. We averaged about four productions a year.

The first nights—how splendid they were! It was a great social event, a first night at His Majesty's. The most beautiful women, the most beautiful jewels, everybody who meant anything in the social and artistic world in the stalls and boxes, flowers, music, sometimes Royalty. Oh, the thrilling hum of excitement as we waited, assembled on the stage, when the first act had been called! Then a gradual dimming of the lights, everywhere silence, and the curtain slowly ascending on that great auditorium of upturned faces, and beyond, in the dimness, the pit.

How I love the pit! Crowded with students, artists and folks of the town, it knows more about acting and plays than any part of the theatre. We actors reach in spirit over the jewels and exquisite manners and culture of the fashionable world to our beloved pit, and know from their attitude if we have success or failure. They tell us the truth. We are their players; they have paid their money and we belong to them, and they are generous in their applause. The stalls, much as they love the actors or the play, do not express their feelings in the same unrestrained way. I hate acting in a theatre without a pit and gallery! They have taught me many lessons, put me in my place if I've acted badly, and, if I've done well, told me so in no uncertain manner. It's wonderful to hear them call your Christian name—a certain sign that you are a favourite and belong to them. The world may flatter, and the friends and acquaintances who crowd into your dressing-room after first nights with the kindest intentions and praise you beyond your deserts may give you a false sense of excitement; but you get the truth from the people who have paid their hard-earned money and have waited outside the theatre for hours to see you.

After first nights Herbert Tree generally invited the

entire company and, it seemed, most of the audience to supper, either on the stage, with long tables on trestles, which were ready in about half an hour after the curtain had fallen, or upstairs in the Dome, or to the Carlton Hotel, next door, where supper was served in a private room.

Nothing in life will ever be like the thrill of my first "first night" at His Majesty's.

"Ulysses"! How I love that play!

We had supper on the stage. My mother was there, embarrassed and shy, but very proud of all the compliments she had received about me.

It was a grand party—everybody in London. Critics, people of the great world, actors and friends, crowded round, congratulating me. Their attitude was entirely different towards me. They treated me as if a new personality had arisen, and I was for the first time in my life a person of serious importance of whom great things were expected. They did not know how young my heart felt—what a child I was. It was so new and unusual. In the years that have passed I have grown used to adulation. I appreciate it none the less. But that night it was an utterly new sensation. I was too young to differentiate between sincerity and flattery—I thought the world was mine and ever would be. I had a new frock for the occasion, and the thrilling thought of my three years' contract made me look my best—no more money worries. Above all, I looked for the first time into the eyes of the man I eventually married. Although we had rehearsed together for weeks, somehow comprehension came on that first night with the first minute of the play. We didn't speak of that look; it came in a flash.

The first scene of "Ulysses" is on Mount Olympus—a fitting place for true lovers to meet. I was Pallas Athene; and as I came up the trap from the earth below, terrified to stand before the great God Zeus and speak the first lines of the play, Mercury looked into my heart and gave me courage.

I hardly knew his name at rehearsals, and I am sure he didn't notice me, as he was having a great flirtation with one of Calypso's nymphs. But there you are! That's how things happen! I was twenty, and he was a few months younger. He didn't come near me at supper, but I was conscious of him all through that triumphant night, whoever I was talking or laughing with. We didn't marry for three years—but that's for later on.

At supper I sat next Monsieur Coquelin. Little did I know he was to become one of my greatest friends and the teacher from whom I learned most of my acting.

I don't seem able to get away from that play, "Ulysses." It haunts me always. Happiness, youth, success, are interwoven with every word of it.

Next morning came the notices. Few young actresses have had such praise as I had. They were amazing—eulogistic; fulsome! I was pronounced the hope of the English stage. My voice, my gesture, my imagination were acclaimed and blazoned to the world. They said I filled a niche in the History of the Theatre that had long been vacant. Some of them even called me the young Siddons come back to life. Was it to be wondered at if I half believed it all? How could any young girl keep her head with life racing on at such a pace?

Stephen Phillips and I became great friends. He had written his first poems, "Marpessa" and "Christ in Hades," when he was an obscure young tutor to somebody or other. After that came "Paolo and Francesca" and "Herod." He also had been drenched in superlatives. They said he was Keats, Shelley and Byron rolled into one.

We were not in the least in love with one another, but we met on common (or rather uncommon) ground as super-beings. He began to write his next play for me, "David and Bathsheba." We used to leave the theatre together after rehearsals with all eyes upon us.

People whispered and smiled, scenting a romance, but it was not as they thought. How different it all was! Sometimes we would have tea or walk and talk about our hopes and poetry and the beloved theatre. Then he would go his way and I would go mine. I never knew where he went, but I was terribly shy about my tryst, although I would have kept it against the whole world! I used to go a different way round to get there, so that the newspaper boys and flower-women at the corner should not notice me going the same way each day. I was ashamed to pass the turn-pike men, who sat inside the gates and smiled tolerantly at me, and by this time thought me definitely mad. But every afternoon, regularly as clockwork, I would go to the National Portrait Gallery and stand and stare at the portrait of Mrs. Siddons on the staircase—the one in the long black dress—and think she came to life and spoke to me. I would imagine her eyes were shining into mine, and that I was her spirit reincarnate. I looked a little bit like her; people have often told me so.

I had another complex too. There was a head of Lord Byron I adored. He was a living person to me; I, one of the myriads who loved him. These two pieces of canvas were actual to me. Perhaps after all my greatest love affair was with the portrait of Lord Byron, and Mrs. Siddons was my most ardent and vital friend. I kept this up for months. I think the critics and their praise had sent me a little mad.

The play was a great success, and Mother and I had a wild debauch of clothes and new hats and set ourselves up in a general way. We both loved clothes. She liked them almost more than I do—and that is saying a lot; but, then, she was very Latin and very feminine, and loved beautiful things and good food and music and gaiety.

This sounds very frivolous, I suppose, because people with a purpose in life are supposed to be without any sense of humour and to abhor charming extravagances.

I can never understand why, when the good God Himself is so frivolous and loves beautiful and gay things. Otherwise He wouldn't have created flowers. But there they are—everywhere—sticking their impudent faces up when we are trying so hard to be serious. Lovely, useless flowers! Isn't this proof that beauty and gaiety are just as necessary in this world as hard work and common-sense?



## CHAPTER XIII

**A**BOUT this time a bad thing happened to me, a thing that might happen to any young artist who suddenly becomes famous. I was taken up by all sorts of people: strange and noble ladies I had never met sent me invitations to luncheon parties and concerts, etc.; professors and academic gentlemen discussed poetry with me and asked me about rhyme and metre. They pointed out small faults and made suggestions about trivialities that were of no consequence. I had made a success and had been proclaimed as speaking blank verse perfectly! This I had done spontaneously, without the slightest self-consciousness, and with no aid but my deep inborn love of poetry. These dear, interested ones began to point out the cogs in the wheel! They discovered difficulties of action and speech which had never entered my mind. As I say, my natural gift had taught me the way to make my success with the public.

How many really talented people have been ruined by the criticism of the amateur!

They never would have come into the light of day if they had not made a spontaneous success entirely "off their own bat," but the minute they have succeeded, be they writer, musician or actor, there are heaps of friends willing to point out a better way and draw attention to the least defects. They do this out of the kindness of their heart and with the very best intentions, but they entirely lose the broad vision of the effective whole. They have a kind of idea that discouraging criticism is a proof of knowledge.

How often they kill the natural gift in a sensitive artist!

Oh, how I suffered from the admiration of my friends ! I was taken up by all sorts of people, treated as if I were an authority on the difficulties and technicalities of speech, told that my poses were purely Greek, asked all sorts of questions as to whether I had taken them from Flaxman or the Tanagras ; if I had studied in South Kensington or the Museum ; how many hours I had stood before the Elgin marbles. I didn't dare say I hadn't the remotest idea who they were talking about and knew very little of Greek mythology. All that I had managed to achieve came naturally, but from the time I was taken up I began to get anxious and self-conscious about my gestures and my voice and poses. My emotion was forced and no longer spontaneous. I lost my nerve and became stilted and studied, and I know from that moment my acting began to deteriorate.

I was very much in demand in those days. I had signed a contract with Arthur Collins of Drury Lane to appear in "Ben Hur" before I had arranged for His Majesty's, and two or three months after "Ulysses" had started its run Mr. Collins called upon my services. He would not release me, and I was in the middle of the success of "Ulysses." The whole thing seemed to be a deadlock. Then Herbert Tree had an inspiration. He changed me from the part of Athene to the goddess Calypso, who appeared in one act only, and I played at Drury Lane in "Ben Hur." I appeared there first, then went back to His Majesty's and played Calypso, and then returned to Drury Lane to finish the part of Iras. It was tremendously hard work, but very exciting.

It is strange that I had done this in the two first musical comedy houses in London—the Gaiety and the Empire—a few years earlier, and now I should be fulfilling the same contract at His Majesty's and Drury Lane.

I suppose the excitement of everything kept me going, because the work and the changing was tremendous, and I had a brougham with one horse—no such thing as a

taxi—which took me between the theatres, and I did my last change in the carriage going along the Strand to Drury Lane at a slow jog-trot. My maid and I would sway about and bump into each other, and then I'd rush into the theatre and on to the stage.

It was a bitterly cold winter, and I can remember sitting in a boat with nothing much on, and the wind blowing through Robert Taber and myself as we made love in the moonlight. We would sit—our teeth chattering—enfolded in each other's arms, and shiver. But I was very young, and survived it. I think he, poor, dear brilliant man that he was, caught the chill which eventually culminated in death during that freezing love scene which, to the audience, looked like the sultry moon-kissed Nile.

By this time I had signed my first three-years' contract at His Majesty's, and Lily Hanbury had secretly supervised my engagements, which was a wonderful and generous thing for her to do. She took the greatest interest in my career although, in a way, I had superseded her at the theatre. But it made no difference at all, and I consulted her about every detail of my business arrangements. She helped me always with my parts and put me on the right track for my future successes.

Looking back, of all the beautiful women I have known in the theatre, I am sure Lily Hanbury all round was the most beautiful. Her lovely tragic mask, with the pointed eyebrows, was full of humour. This sounds incongruous, but she had the humour of a child or a clown. If she wanted to be funny she could keep us in screams of laughter. I never heard her say any unkind word about anybody; she was full of tolerance, and the kindness of her soul shone through her eyes. I think I loved her more than any woman I have ever worked with in the theatre. She had none of the small but human defects of most of us, no jealousies, no inhibitions. Just frank gaiety of soul and a generosity that was unbelievable; added to this, the most appealing beauty.

In the summer the family had a little house at Herne Bay. It was crowded like a rabbit warren with beautiful young women—Lily and her sister Hilda, and her cousins. Added to these were her aunts and uncles. I never saw so many human beings packed in so small a space. They used to take me to stay with them, and we girls would sleep three in a room. In the mornings we would all go down to the sea and bathe. It was like the sirens come to shore.

Lily had a violent temper that passed like a breeze, leaving strangers devastated but making anyone who knew her laugh. We never took that temper seriously; we called it "going peculiar." She swam like a fish, and I remember she saved a girl from drowning one day, risking her own life willingly. But, when it was all over and the danger was past, she was so furious with the rescued one for giving us all such a fright that I think the victim would rather have sunk than have her adored one so angry. For every one, without exception, adored Lily.

She had the greatest sense of the dignity of the theatre, and if anybody said anything belittling about it (an outsider who didn't understand the love and adoration we true mummies feel for it) Lily's indignation was overwhelming, and her lovely, laughing face would go so "peculiar" and look so tragic that the tactless one was paralysed. But her temper passed like a solitary thunder clap in a clear blue sky; she never could keep it up for more than a second. What an absolute darling she was, and how beloved! Those who knew her called her "Arum," and the name suited her; she *wasn't* like a cold, white Easter lily. What an inspiration such a woman is in the theatre, and what a privilege to have had the friendship of such a one!

When we were acting together, she took me absolutely under her wing. No girl was ever so happy as I in the beginning of my career in the great theatre. After rehearsals, if Herbert Tree had been extra severe, he would drop his managerial attitude and become a boy

again. He would pack Lily and me, and perhaps some other friends, into his motor-car and drive us all over the country. He had no sense of time and, if there wasn't a performance in the evening, we would drive for hours, stopping on the way to get food, happy, laughing, irresponsible people with not a care in the world. The soft twilight descended on us with the breezes growing cool on our faces and the mystery of the roads beginning under the stark gaunt shadows of the trees. Then came the darkness; we would huddle up together and drive into the black night. There were always too many people in the car, but it saved the bumps.

Oh, that car! Cars were a great luxury in those days, and people weren't very used to motoring, therefore it was thrilling and exciting whatever the car was like. It was open and it had a door at the back, and we climbed up a couple of steps and sat sideways, facing each other. It hadn't any springs to speak of, and rattled and groaned and bumped along, but it was the chariot of the gods to us. Sometimes it refused to go at all, and we would sit on a wayside bank for hours waiting for it to change its mind. Nobody seemed to understand its works, and it either went or stopped entirely on its own initiative. It was more temperamental than a *prima donna*; for suddenly, for no reason at all, with gurgles and splutterings, it would start off again, and we would rush to scramble in. It was very different from the motoring of to-day, but much more fun. We didn't eat till we were hungry; then we would knock up some inn and make the people come down and give us bread and cheese or whatever happened to be going—we didn't mind as long as there was enough of it.

I can remember the stark feeling of the cold wind on my face as we came into the lighted room of some inn out of the dark romantic night. I can see Lily's sparkling eyes and flushed cheeks and ruffled hair. However disagreeable the innkeeper was, he always succumbed to Lily and cooked us eggs and bacon.



If ever I have felt a slight pang of jealousy or envy of any artist, I have always thought back to Lily Hanbury and the example she set, and have tried to help any younger woman than myself. I have thought of Lily's greater ideals and truer understanding of life. She seemed to me like "The Master Builder"—she handed on her knowledge to the future instead of greedily hoarding it.

We cannot kill progress or the years that overtake us, and our only hope is to go with them.



## CHAPTER XIV

**I** MET M. Coquelin many times during that following season, and he taught me a great many things. He was a very severe critic, but his criticism was always constructive. He never pointed out any fault to me without showing me the way to remedy it.

Plans were made for the forthcoming season, and I was to play *Roma* in Hall Caine's new play, "The Eternal City." It was a magnificent feeling—the security of a great leading part in the autumn and a lovely summer holiday ahead. I had never been to Paris, and Mother and I determined to start our holiday there. Added to that, we had an invitation from Mme. Cazin, the wife of the great painter, to go and stay with her for three weeks at Equihan, near Boulogne. Monsieur Coquelin arranged it.

What a wonderful year it was for me—the breaking up of the season at His Majesty's was like a great school festival, all the company were happy knowing they would meet again in the autumn. Sir Herbert gave one of his famous supper-parties to wind up with on the last night, and we were all very gay, and the next morning my mother and I started off. First we went to Paris. It was all so exciting. I did not know a word of French, neither did my mother. Imagine our arrival at the station, our bewilderment—and then, on the platform, the kind, genial, little figure of M. Coquelin to meet us! It was entirely unexpected, as he was supposed to be at his country house the other side of Paris, but I had written and told him I was coming over. He took us to a modest little hotel, very French and absolutely charm-

ing, and then followed the most glorious week ever dreamed of.

Oh, the theatres! I went with M. Coquelin to see Sarah Bernhardt for the first time, as Camille. That voice! The like of it will never be heard again. I think that was the first jerk I had as to my limitations, the first prick in the bubble of my self-esteem, but I gloried in it. He took me to see Réjane, Jeanne Granier, M. Monet-Sully; in fact, all the great ones of that time. We were received in the theatres like royalty because we were friends of M. Coquelin. Sometimes he took us to dinner at the Ritz, and M. Ritz (an old gentleman, and very wealthy) would come and chat with us. M. Coquelin told me that, in spite of his great fortune, he couldn't bear to leave the restaurant and hotel that had given him his fortune. He would rather be walking about and greeting his old customers and friends than live the luxurious life he had earned for himself. M. Coquelin took us all over Paris to the dear little real French restaurants, where no English people go and where they have very simple food. I remember one where they cooked only three dishes. It was run by two men and their wives. The women were the cooks, the men served the meal in their shirt-sleeves, but the food was absolutely perfect. You had to have exactly what they served, and people who knew that little tiny restaurant up a narrow flight of stairs almost fought to get tables. It was strange to see women in gorgeous jewels and furs eating in that plain, almost humble room.

Some nights we would go to queer little restaurants over the river in the Latin Quarter that I had read about and adored. Ah, Paris—the magic city of the Seine! Shall I ever forget that first visit? Sitting on a little green chair, sipping my absinthe, which I did not like very much but felt was part of the proceedings. The passers-by, the gay lights, the music, the talk!—people around me looking exactly as if they had come out of Murger's "*Vie de Bohème*" or the chorus of a musical

comedy, so picturesque and amusing were they. Or the mornings, strolling in the Bois, under the trees, watching the carriages and the children playing with their hoops or battledores and shuttlecocks, or walking in the Champs-Élysées—Elysian fields indeed to me? I was a girl then on her first visit, dazzled with success and flattery, beautiful, young, full to the brim with romance and false values. Indeed the city was tipped with gold for me!

Then followed the visit to Mme. Cazin. M. Coquelin was to join us on the farm in about a week's time. Mme. Cazin herself was a delightful woman. She was very slender and dark and always wore white, and I used to see her flitting about her garden or down the sloping hills in the dunes like a white butterfly. She hardly knew a word of English, and my mother and I knew no French, but we had long conversations by gesture, and by the time M. Coquelin joined us we were getting on splendidly.

Coquelin as an artist was world-famous, but the man very few knew, and I always feel it was one of the greatest privileges of my life that he extended his friendship to me.

Coquelin, the little bourgeois peasant, who never lost his simple dignity and had the strength of character to remain the same to the humble and the great, loved the theatre and always upheld the dignity and importance of the actor's art. Decorations from the Government were as nothing to him compared to the high standing of the theatre. He was tremendously proud of his origin, and loved to show me the little baker's shop in Boulogne where he served as a boy. His greatest friend had been the fisherman's son with whom he played at Equihan, and this little boy afterwards became the great French painter.

No doubt it was through his long and devoted friendship with Cazin that Coquelin got his sympathy with painting and understanding of pictorial effects. It was this influence which led him to acquire his splendid private

collection of pictures, chosen with the knowledge of an absolute connoisseur.

It is extraordinary to think of these two small boys building their castles in the sands becoming the great actor and painter of France, but still more extraordinary that their careers did not separate them, but from time to time these growing children returned together to their sand castles at Equihan.

All forms of art, though, had their appeal for Coquelin. He was specially fond of orchestral music. He never missed an opportunity of seeing or hearing another artist, and he was always most generous in his praise. One thing I remember he said of himself which was most apt; he said he had no modesty and no conceit. The friends who knew him well called him "Coq," and he always wore a beautiful chain made in the design of cock's feathers. His association with this bird resulted in a large collection of ornaments and souvenirs sent him for luck by his many admirers, and perhaps—who knows?—that is one of the reasons why the idea of "Chantecler" first grew in Rostand's mind.

It was during that summer at Equihan that he began to study "Chantecler," and we would lean over the chicken runs and watch the cocks and hens strutting about. I had an opportunity of watching the great artist working. Five years he studied the play, the time being prolonged owing to the difficulty of getting the manuscript from Rostand.

Every morning, from the balcony, during those days on the farm he used to recite the "Ode to the Sun," gazing across the sea with the full sun blazing down upon him.

The play, as Coquelin described it to me, is meant to depict the insularity of all humanity. The cock, in all the brilliance of his plumage, represents Power—but power with useless wings! The little brown pheasant—Freedom, hard to realize since her soul is buried in such dull brown hues. The cock is content, surrounded by



WITH M. COQUELIN IN THE GARDEN AT EQUIHAN





the farmyard walls with his supreme control and power, but the little hen pheasant persuades him to come out into the world through the gap in the wall; and out in the woods this arrogant cock, who has never heard any other voice but his own, suddenly listens to the unseen nightingale in the trees, and in his self-abnegation and humiliation finds his real power, not as the herald of the morning, the autocrat of the dawn, but as the humble scraper of the ground, his claws planted in the brown earth, trumpeting the appeal of the world for light—not as a right, but the priceless gift of the sun.

The “make-up” he devised was, I think, never used. He had a beak on the nose, leaving his mouth free; on his chin was the crop, the comb on his forehead, the feathers beginning just over his ears, giving the cock’s face a semblance of humanity. In no sense was his “make-up” a mask.

Coquelin was the antithesis of modern, self-indulgent, “art”-driven wage-earners. Added to his rolling voice, free gait, splendid virility, mobile face, he was equipped with great physical strength as well as artistic sensibility. Not for him the natural manners of the drawing-room, the unexhausting and unmoving realism, not for him the “heart-to-heart” vivisection, not for him introspection or self-pity. His was the real classic style, part of an art now dead, and quite impossible to revive since the form in which art lives must always be more or less an expression of its time.

He was almost a Spartan in his life, believing that actors had to live like race-horses. The last of the great classical school, he had all the elemental qualities—strength, passion, joy, generosity—none of the modern substitutes: he was entirely lacking in destructive criticism—cynicism and blasé indifference were unknown to him.

We often went to his “Home of actors”—a fulfilment of a desire he had cherished all his life, and which he was able to realize shortly before his death. He bought a

house at Pont aux Dames, in the country, with beautiful grounds, and in the great garden was his haven for old actors and actresses. There was no wall built up between his success and their failure. They shared his garden, for he understood that to feed and protect the body was nothing compared to feeding and protecting the soul.

They had their own theatre, and he used to bring down the greatest artists of the day to play for them in many of the modern plays, and Sarah Bernhardt would go all that way to act for them. The old men and women used to fight and quarrel, discuss and live again their past triumphs, and in this enchanted garden they were free to live in glorious memories. They paid a little fee each year, and in no way lost their sense of independence. All that Coquelin got from the theatre he gave back to the theatre generously and freely.

There was a stream running through the garden, and on a sunny afternoon, under a huge green umbrella, Coquelin, in his white alpaca coat, would sit and solemnly fish for hours. There was a little pavilion in the garden which used to belong to Du Barry, and statues of all the greatest actors could be found in the grounds. I remember standing under the statue of Rachel, whom Coquelin told me he had seen act when he was eight years old and whom he had never forgotten; and, whether because of his youth or not, he said it was his greatest impression of the theatre; that he had never seen an audience so excited for any other artist. They literally rose in a body to cheer her.

He spoke English perfectly, with the English intonation, although his vocabulary was not large. He was always anxious to act in English, and had studied the gravedigger in "Hamlet," and was to have played it the year he died. I remember he was anxious to introduce some bit of business which would identify the skull as that of Yorick, by finding, perhaps, some remnants of his cap and bells.

The other part which appealed to him strongly was that

of Iago, which he naturally conceived from the comedy point of view, taking the line "Honest, honest Iago!" as the keynote of the part. He said the only dangerous villains were those with the bluff, hearty, sincere exteriors.

I cannot say to what particular creed Coquelin belonged, but he had a deeply religious vein and talked of religion more beautifully than any other friend I have had.

But whenever I think of Coquelin it is always at that farm where we stayed with Mme. Cazin that glorious summer. We led the most fantastic life in the world, and yet the only life artists should live. The house was built on a hill. The family had gradually acquired the land around, and their property spread from the little fisherman's cottage on the beach right up the hill to the cliffs. Here Cazin painted most of his pictures amongst the grey dunes and the sand. Just outside the farm he painted his famous "Madonna and Joseph entering Bethlehem," Joseph leading the ass, and the Virgin mounted, holding the Child, as they crossed the grey sands to the city.

Cazin had built a big farm for his family, and then, higher up the hill, in sight of the big house, was a little second house that we called the "House of Moods," where he went to be alone. On the one side of it was the open sea and the dunes, on the other were two little high-walled monastery gardens, very cosy and full of flowers, shutting out the sight of the ocean entirely.

At the top of the cliff was his studio—no moods there, only results. Six of Cazin's greatest pictures hung there in his studio on the cliff—the family would not part with them and few but his intimate friends had seen them.

When M. Coquelin invited me there Cazin was dead, and Coquelin lived in the little lonely "House of Moods"; but the spirit of the painter haunted us when we went up to his studio and saw the wild sea, the stretching dunes,

and the moon. Mme. Cazin, herself an artist, painted beautifully too. Her son was a sculptor, and did a bust of me and painted me several times.

We had our meals on a wide balcony overlooking the sea, and at night, when there was a full moon and a silver path over the water leading up to it, the beauty of the garden around us and the romance of it were almost unbearable.

I used to be up at about six or seven in the morning and go down with young Cazin to the fishermen. We would go out to sea in the boats or wade with them with their big shrimping-nets. None of us wore shoes or stockings. We lived absolutely like the fishing people. We would come back from our exploits with the fishermen, tired out; and, if it was too hot for the balcony, we would lunch under the little shimmering green beech trees, and Coquelin would recite to us in his full deep voice bits from the poets and from Molière, and sometimes he would get up and act a scene, or talk profoundly of the God he believed in with the simplicity of a peasant.

Then we would sleep in hammocks under the cool branches until the sun grew less fierce, and then perhaps Coquelin and I would go off to Boulogne and wander about and talk and buy cakes at the baker's shop and eat them at the counter, and he would tell me tales of his childhood and of when he was so small he could not see over the top of that counter.

I shall never forget the impression of that time—I, who had spent my summers in the Kennington Road, in dusty, drab lodgings, and never dreamt that such beauty and grace of living could exist. They did not spend much money at Equihan, their life was very simple, but everything about it and everything they did was full of magic.

Here Coquelin stayed every summer, although he was the friend of emperors and kings and was offered the hospitality of the greatest houses; but he never deserted

the farm and the dunes and the wide-open sea he had loved as a boy.

I was beginning to be educated at last in my contact with the world.

How splendid it had been, that summer! My first real holiday! The new country; different language; Paris; clothes; Mme. Cazin; those summer nights in the terraced garden over the moon-silvered sea. What an education for an unlearned ignorant girl!

Wonderful talks about the theatre—the Greek drama. Coquelin was the first to tell me of the evolution of my beloved Harlequinade in Italy.

Coquelin knew everything! I never met a mind so full, so overbrimming, or a tongue so eloquent.

He told me of Rachel, and Sarah, and Monet-Sully, and Duse, and all the splendid troupe. Their names were bandied about between us with loving tenderness and familiarity. They didn't seem far away, inaccessible people any more. I—my youth and ego rampant—felt myself one of them. I loved to hear every detail of their lives and to discover they took pleasure in little things and had small weaknesses like other people. He dragged them down from their pedestals and made us friends. He taught me to know and love them and not to fear them.

How intimate those godlike figures of the drama seemed; how near! "Coq" turned them into comrades as we talked of our beloved theatre in those long-ago summer nights.

Those great ones lived again in me, and in the years to come I felt I should take my place among them. I imagined, with the confidence of youth, I was picked out from the rest in my profession to make history in the theatre.

The wonderful summer came to an end at last with the middle of July, and I started back to England to take up my serious career at His Majesty's.

Ah, those wild dreams of youth, how soon they are



shattered! I love still to see that mien of confidence in very young people. It isn't conceit, it is a childish courage, an eagerness for the fray, a straining for the fight. I love to see their bold, undaunted eyes looking into the shining future. It is only in later life we find our dreams are mostly mirage and learn the lesson of submission and limitation.



## CHAPTER XV

WELL, back I went to London, undefeated, fully convinced I was chosen to make history in the theatre.

I felt splendid, very much "in looks"; very brown—from long days in the sea and wading on the sands with my dress tucked up to my knees and a shrimping-net. I had been barefoot most of the time, and it was agony to get back to civilization and tight shoes; but London was calling me.

Up to that time my career had been a succession of small triumphs, culminating in the great one, Pallas Athene. I had had no set-back since I had started seriously on the stage.

When I got back to London there were two or three days before rehearsals were called for the opening of the autumn season. It was a thrilling feeling for me to be now the leading lady, in undisputed sway, at His Majesty's! No girl ever felt so proud! And it was unbelievable that only a few months before I had been allowed to act on that stage merely as a last resource, and because Sir Herbert couldn't get anyone else, and that I had had such success and such immediate promotion.

When the day came for the assembling of the company, I picked out one of my new frocks and took special care of my appearance, and drove down to the theatre quivering with excitement.

I am certain that success is the most beautifying thing in the world. Self-confidence and a knowledge of power

seems to point one's looks amazingly. Since I left the Gaiety I had almost forgotten I was a beauty. Now a sense of it came back to me, and I knew myself beautiful. There was a subtle tribute to me in the looks and smiles I got from the company and the many congratulations.

After I had greeted them and they had wished me luck and prosperity for the beginning of my contract, I looked round for "Mercury"—but he wasn't there. He was no longer a member of the company. He had been sent to America to act in a new play.

I had a vague sense of loss and disappointment, although I had not thought about him much while I had been away. I learnt afterwards my friends judged it wiser for him to go, and the matter had been arranged, as we were both very young and it would have been disastrous for me to marry at that moment, with so much career-making ahead.

The play we were to do was called "The Eternal City." It was a romantic, sentimental play, not very true, but full of theatre. The part I was cast for, Roma, went all through the piece. She was incredibly noble and incredibly misunderstood. I had not, up to that time, learned sufficient technique to give a semblance of verity to a rôle I could not feel. In fact, I was too inexperienced to hold a play of that sort together, and my acting, on the whole, was pretty bad. I had no resources, no tricks, and the part needed all that to make it acceptable. In Pallas Athene I had had the advantage of a poet's mind. His imagination inspired me, set me aflame, but here I was—with a banal, long-winded heroine, always changing her dress and ladling out platitudes!

I gave a performance the public liked, but the critics dragged me from the throne where they had placed me. They tore off my laurels and rolled me in the mud. I suppose I deserved all they said of me, but the shock was awful. I grew up in a single night. They had called me the "Young Siddons" and compared me with the

memory of Rachel. I think they were a little ashamed of their overpraise and a little jealous of my sudden leap to fame, and so they went to the other extreme; but I was bewildered, broken, swinging like a pendulum between overpraise and overblame! Those were the first bad notices I had ever had, though the play was a huge success and I was more popular with the public than ever. But all through the long and prosperous run, however much personal praise I received, those wounds would not heal. I think I bear the scars still on my heart!

"The Eternal City" made such a lot of money and was so "obstinately successful," as Herbert Tree said, that he could not take it off. This annoyed him very much. He would go about with a gloomy face, and when I asked him what was the matter he would say, "The business is up to-night." He genuinely couldn't bear long runs. The money part of it meant nothing to him.

A very unpleasant incident happened to me in this play. It might have ended my career entirely. I had to change my dress eight times in the play, and in one act I wore some magnificent sables. They had been lent to me by the firm who dressed me for the sake of advertisement, and were made into a wide stole, lined with ermine.

They were magnificent furs, and worth about a thousand pounds. The fame of them went all over England—it was the first time furs had been worn in the shape of a stole. The rumoured value of them grew and grew as a rolling stone gathers the proverbial moss. Eventually I received a clipping from a paper in Australia deploring women's extravagances and stating that an actress on the London stage wore furs worth twelve thousand pounds. It was a cutting from some obscure revolutionary journal, and the clipping was posted to me anonymously.

I read it and laughed. About three weeks after that I received an unsigned letter saying that I must sell my furs for the sake of the poor. But as the furs didn't

belong to me or to the management—had been lent me by the dressmaker—again I laughed and threw the letter aside. About a week passed. Again a threatening note in my mail, this time a little more menacing and stating a date when the sender would expect to see some result. They told me they had a method of finding out whether I was attending to their demands or not. I didn't laugh quite so much this time, as the threats were beginning to get slightly on my nerves. When the fourth one came, stating that if I did not do as I was told I should be kidnapped at the stage door and not be allowed to appear at the theatre again, I got a little frightened. I took the letter to Sir Herbert. He read it through and reassured me.

But the letters became more frequent, and notes were sent to my home and to the restaurants where I was lunching or dining. It was extraordinary how they found out my exact whereabouts.

I began to get very nervous, and so did the management. The letters were posted from all over England, and no trace could be found of their origin. Eventually a date was set, and I was told that I should be shot as I left the stage door and warned to prepare my soul to meet my God. It was terrifying. The theatre was full of detectives. Everybody watched me; I had a body-guard and I was smuggled out of side doors. The promised date came, and went, and nothing happened. The relief was almost worse than the suspense. I was a nervous wreck. The next day a fanatical mad letter, the most frightening of all, saying they were only waiting their opportunity to put their threat into practice and they would give me no further warning!

I was so paralysed that I could hardly act at all, and arrangements were made for me to go into the country and give up the part for a time.

I shall never forget my agony of mind. I thought I should be shot from the audience. I could not turn a corner for fear! Sir Herbert was just as worried. He



AS 'ROMA' WITH SIR HERBERT TREE AS 'THE BARON BONELLI' IN  
'THE ETERNAL CITY'





used to read the letters again and again, and he had detectives working all over London and in the audience for every performance.

Herbert Tree had an uncanny seventh sense, and one day he said to me as he held the papers in his hand :

"I feel these letters come from some one quite near us."

Then began a thorough search of all our acquaintances, and every member of the staff and all the officials of the theatre.

There was a big scene in the play where I, as Roma, was received in audience by the Pope. I knelt before him as he sat surrounded by his cardinals, in their long scarlet robes. My nerves were in such a terrible state that I dreaded that scene. It seemed to look like a sea of blood to my tortured mind.

One day, just as we were giving up the search in despair, a member of the company told Sir Herbert that one of the supers in the upper dressing-room was behaving in a very odd manner. When the others left the dressing-room the man stayed behind. He was pointed out to me—very young and thin and pale, with a gentle face and a wonderful illuminating smile. They made a plan to return suddenly to the room and find out what he was doing, and twice they caught him on his knees, praying fervently. They found out that he wore no shoes and stockings and had nothing but rough sacking under his thin suit, and it was winter. He was one of the cardinals who stood beside me on the stage in the great scene with the Pope. His place was next to me, within two yards.

They seized him as he was going on the stage one night, and found under his robe a long butcher's knife and a scroll setting forth his reasons for killing me. He said he had to sacrifice me to the poor, as he was the Son of God and had been sent back to earth for this deed. He was a religious, homicidal maniac. He wore sacking next his skin in place of a hair shirt, and prayed

fervently for me every night, and he stood there beside me at each performance—I had not known how near I was to death.

They took him to a lunatic asylum, poor soul, and we never heard of him again.

## CHAPTER XVI

THE play had a long run, and as time went on I got more used to my position as leading lady.

I am so thankful I knew those splendid days and lived in a time when the theatre was still glamorous.

There were magnificent parties in the dome, after the play, at night. Artists and diplomats, Cabinet Ministers, actors, painters and scientists, aristocrats and Bohemians—in fact, every notable and interesting person of the day. World politics were discussed, or the newest book or play, or just brilliant nonsense, but everybody talked. People knew how to talk, and “talking” was the fashion.

Then, to crown all, were the gala nights, when the King and Queen, for the entertainment of some foreign royalty, would command a performance. The men were magnificent in full court dress, with black velvet knee-breeches and decorations, and the women with their magnificent tiaras. No one can imagine the splendour of those nights as you looked from the stage into the auditorium, ablaze with jewels.

The dress circle was turned into a huge box, decorated with flowers for their Majesties, their royal guests and their retinues. The theatre literally glistened and shone with colour.

I remember very well the last time the German Emperor and Empress came to England. The King commanded a performance for them. It was almost the last gala night at His Majesty's. The Prince of Wales and the Emperor's daughter (afterwards Duchess of Brunswick) were next each other; they talked and laughed like two children, and looked so charming. No one dreamt that

anything so disastrous as a world war would come about, as they all seemed, sitting there, a happy family. Sir Herbert was a great diplomatist and had ordered the orchestra to play the Emperor's music. The Kaiser took himself very seriously as a musician. Clara Butt and myself and several others were deputed to distribute ourselves over the theatre and lead the applause. The excitement was so great that few had read their programmes or realized the Kaiser's music was being played. We did our job very well, and the audience followed our example—feeling it was the right thing to do. The Emperor looked delighted at the response, as he rose and bowed and smiled at the Empress in appreciation.

Once, we were commanded by King Edward to Dublin. We had to start directly after the play, rehearse all day and night, and most of the next day, play in the evening, and sail back on the following morning without going to bed! We were tired out when we got back to London, but we had to give a performance, as the theatre had been closed when we were away, and it was packed for our return. For the command in Dublin we did an act of several plays: a scene from "Trilby," another from "The Last of the Dandies," and an act, I think, of "Richard II." I don't remember what the fourth item was, but you can imagine the cost of taking that huge amount of scenery over to Ireland and back again for one single performance. I believe the expenses amounted to £2000, and Sir Herbert paid them.

I mention this because I want you to realize on what a magnificent and enormous scale the theatre was conducted. And the head of all this was an actor—with no money! Herbert Tree never thought about it, and yet money seemed to flow towards him. He lived as luxuriously and splendidly as a prince, the expenditure in his theatre was lavish beyond belief, and yet he always had to go to the box office to borrow half a crown.

He gambled with Fate, and won. Most people called it luck, and he certainly was the luckiest person I ever

knew. People imagined he had tremendous backing behind him, but this is not true. He shouldered all the responsibility himself. He told me once that, when he produced "Trilby," he and his wife and child had no money at all. They were living in lodgings and economizing in every way. Yet he undertook that big production and put his all into it without a breath of fear, and he built His Majesty's Theatre out of the proceeds.

He had the miraculous capacity of throwing off all sense of responsibility and forgetting everything concerning his business. He took the deepest interest in the smallest, most childish thing. He could do this after leaving a nerve-racking rehearsal, and within ten minutes be a boy again.

This saved him, I am certain, for had he brooded over his worries and responsibilities he would have gone into a lunatic asylum. He had another really marvellous quality—a capacity for making up his mind. So many of us can get to the final point and then are not able to say yes or no. Tree said yes or no—he never wobbled; if he undertook a thing he went through with it, though all the world tried to dissuade him, and even though at times he was wrong. He had the obstinacy of his convictions.

This is a gift that is bestowed on the beloved of the gods—the gift of decision.

I got to know everybody in London. Sir Herbert, as head of the English stage, was as representative and important as an ambassador. If a foreign artist came to London—Sarah Bernhardt or Lucien Guitry, or whoever it might be—there would be a splendid if rather formal reception in their honour.

I found myself one night sitting with Puccini on one side and Henri Bernstein on the other. Puccini spoke Italian, and Bernstein French, and I knew hardly a word of any language but English. All through my summer in France with Mme. Cazin I spoke my own

language that the family and Monsieur Coquelin might learn it. I had some very embarrassing moments, and I sat there stupidly, trying to pretend I understood. But foreigners are very kind. When Henri Bernstein realized my predicament, he tactfully came to my rescue with his knowledge of English, and with gestures and smiles and a word here and there we got on splendidly.

Oh, how I have regretted my lack of knowledge of the speech of other countries when I look back over the legions of my lost friends! I know that I would have been great friends with Puccini if I had understood a word he said.

But there is a certain humanity among folks of the artistic world that kills self-consciousness, and in spite of all we got on famously. Those parties sounded as if the door of the Tower of Babel had been left open! Every known language could be heard. All the well-known people of the day would be there, jumbled together in friendship: Winston Churchill and Lloyd George arguing with Maxine Elliot on some political point; Dorothea Baird (the original Trilby in England) talking to the Chinese Minister about the Welfare of Babies, on which she is an expert; W. S. Gilbert, his white head bent in kindly understanding, explaining the art of diction to some charming beginner; Mrs. Asquith, the Bishop of London and Coquelin, deep in discussion; Max Beerbohm too, smiling that insidious smile of his, bowing gently to his partner while his great eyes stared dreamily ahead; F. E. Smith, Comyns Carr, Lily Hanbury, Julia Neilson and Arthur Pinero, and H. B. Irving, full of inside information about the latest murder trial at the Old Bailey. He was a great criminologist. How often he has frightened me so that I hated to go to bed!

There were crowds of others too! Brilliant painters, writers, critics, and directors from Russia and Paris and Germany. The discussions were tremendous! All adored the theatre as one adores the youngest of the family—the baby sister of the arts. Everybody who made history



and laughter and music and gave thought and imagination to the world would be gathered under that dome, and had something to say about—and offer to—the theatre.

Lady Tree presided at one of the long tables, and Sir Herbert at the other. There was always a great deal of laughter from Lady Tree's table. She talked brilliantly. Viola Tree would be there, very young and tenderly spring-like. We called her "The Twig." Over the chattering, sparkling, brilliant crowd loomed the high mysterious roof. I used to fancy that up there in the darkness bats were flying, and owls hooting and strange spirits whispering. And on winter nights the wind made weird sighings and sobbings as if the ghosts of the great ones of the past were trying to get in out of the night and join the gaiety: Garrick and Peg Woffington and Edmund Kean and Mrs. Siddons—I often fancied they were amongst us! Dear ghosts! How short their reign had been, except in memory, and they must have loved life so!

If nobody was speaking to me (I was very young in those days and the conversation sometimes soared above me) I used to fancy the door opened and they stepped over the threshold. A gay, laughing group, in their costumes—straight from Drury Lane.

It was eerie up in the dome at night, and I never liked to be left alone there. But Herbert Tree didn't fear it. How he loved his theatre!

When everybody had left he would go back and rake the dying embers together and sit beside the fire, alone in the great building except for the night-watchman below. I never understood how he did it, as he was rather a timid man—but he was happier there than anywhere else. His theatre was his home. I used to imagine him opening the little window and welcoming those restless spirits. They must have been around him, for he was never lonely there. It was his haven.

I always like to think of him in the dome. They say he haunts it still. I shouldn't wonder!

## CHAPTER XVII

EVERY Sunday I would lunch at Mrs. Beerbohm's house in Upper Berkeley Street. It was a shabby, friendly little house with a life-worn air. Every bit of furniture looked as if it had grown up with the family, it had such a Georgian atmosphere. Always exactly the same lunch—roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and, I think, apple dumpling with cream. Those lunches were an institution, and it was a privilege to be asked. Max was nearly twenty years younger than his half-brother, Herbert Tree, and at those Sunday lunches you would meet his friends. The brilliant younger set—most of their names are household words now: Somerset Maugham, rather shabby and not yet acknowledged as a successful playwright, although he had had a play or two produced and greatly praised; Will Rothenstein, already the glory of the artists, but unknown as yet to the general public; Robbie Ross, with his genius for friendship; exquisite Charles Conder—his mind packed with profound knowledge and fantasy. He knew everything! I used to consult him like the oracle. But it is no good going over the whole list, nearly all of them have fulfilled the promise of those early days. Everybody seemed to have a total disregard for money; it wasn't important whether one ate caviare or boiled eggs so long as friends could be together and talk.

Money has assumed such gigantic proportions since the war. It was amazing how happy we all were without it. People saw each other more frequently. At least once or twice a week the same group would meet and talk over their plans and hopes and ideas. They seemed to catch

fire from each other and work better for it. Nowadays one is so distributed that one's energies get depleted; we are always meeting strange people; we are not refreshed and energized by frequent contact with minds of our own calibre. I don't mean that other forms of society are not equally intelligent, but I am sure people who are doing the same kind of work and thinking along the same lines get more out of each other.

The Beerbohms were the most enchanting family. Max, of course, needs no introduction; but there were Constance and Agnes and Julius. Aggie and Max were half-brother and sister to the rest of the family—Herbert, Constance and Julius. Their father had married sisters; therefore Mrs. Beerbohm was not only stepmother, but also aunt to the elder ones. There was another brother, Claude, whom I never met. He married a princess in the Far East, and never came home!

They were all totally different.

Mrs. Neville (Aggie), gay and amusing and high-spirited; Constance, who has never married, vague and dreamy and imaginative. She lived in a world of her own. Her thoughts were so far away that she hardly ever heard anything correctly. I remember one day she startled everybody by saying she had met a friend of Max's who had a wonderful parrot. The parrot was so intelligent that, if it tasted a little wine, it could tell the year of vintage. This sounded so incredible that our faces must have expressed our amazement. However, Constance persisted in her story. She did a lot of writing for different papers, and had made up her mind that the description of the magic parrot should go to the "Daily Mail." She had spent all the morning writing the story. We did not like to contradict her, but Max came in a little later, and we made her repeat the tale to him. He laughed and said: "Constance means the man has a wonderful *palate*."

At the head of the table would be Mrs. Beerbohm, small and keen-eyed, in her lace cap and black silk dress,

looking very dignified, but with the wit and humour of a gamin.

Julius was, perhaps, the most amazing of the family. He hadn't the faintest idea of the significance of money. He was a popular and enchanting conversationalist. He was beautiful to look at, and he had a most romantic imagination coupled with a curious business instinct.

He could commercialize dreams !

He hypnotized a group of hard-headed business men in the City into financing him in a scheme to drag the Nile for the jewels of the Pharaohs !

He bought an hotel one day, when he was out for a walk in Marienbad, paid a deposit on it—and then forgot where it was, and never went back to find it.

Once, in Dieppe, when we were all of us having a good time, Julius gambled himself down to his last louis. Herbert was furious with him for daring to play so high, but Julius threw the final louis on one of the smaller tables and wandered off somewhere. An hour later he strolled back, and there was a pile of money awaiting him. He had forgotten all about his louis, and his number had run seven times and the stake had doubled each time. He was indeed the darling of the gods ! And quite irrepressible. He took his winnings to the high table and got a small fortune, and from that time on had a phenomenal run of luck.

I remember being taken to see him one day. He was lying in bed translating Heine (whom he adored) into English while the broker's men—very bored—waited downstairs. They had been there for days, but Julius was quite unperturbed. There was never any money for long in his vicinity, but what would some bored millionaire give for one hour of his enchanted existence !

Life was full of contrasts for me too. I spent most of my day at the British Museum, in Sidney Colvin's house, and in the evenings went to grand parties and was very frivolous.

Sidney Colvin took care of the prints in the Museum, and had a house on the right-hand corner just inside the gates. He was an old man when I knew him, with a mind full of knowledge and a deep appreciation of all things beautiful, though not himself an artist. He was a fine critic, and his loyalty to the few he took under his wing was remarkable.

He had been the lifelong friend of Robert Louis Stevenson, as had Mrs. Sitwell, the lady Mr. Colvin later married. They adopted me, in a way, and their kindness was unending. They were not married when I first knew them, but were the closest friends. They gave me the only education I have ever had. I had always loved poetry, but I would wade through miles and miles of it, good and bad alike, and find myself in the end bewildered, my mind cluttered with half knowledge! Sidney Colvin made it clearer for me. He, I should think, had read every bit of poetry and every book that had ever been published, besides being overwhelmed with unpublished manuscripts. He made lists of the finest things for me to read. Every mind needs pruning and cultivating for better growth. Sidney Colvin pointed my tastes, so to speak. He taught me to appreciate the best.

Not that taste and feeling can be inculcated into a person if it isn't there; but, if it is there, it can be brought out and polished like a diamond. I genuinely loved poetry, but he did not let me waste my time on the half-way things—until I had learnt to differentiate between good and bad and could choose for myself!

Many of Robert Louis Stevenson's poems and stories were written in that solemn house at the corner of the British Museum we called "The Monument." Sidney Colvin's descriptions of him were entrancing, and made him seem so vivid to me, although he had been dead many years then.

They—Mr. Colvin and Mrs. Sitwell—had met him by chance at a little inn in Scotland, and his personality had



arrested and thrilled them. A tall, slight, drooping figure with brilliant black eyes! He could not have been more than twenty-two. They saw him coming along the road, with his knapsack on his back, hot and tired. He opened the little gate of the garden of the inn and came up the path to get a meal before he resumed his walking tour!

It seems he chose that place by chance, but what an amazing meeting, and who says that Fate does not shape our destiny?

They needed each other through life, those three, and so that chance meeting came about.

Robert Louis Stevenson's name was unknown then; he was a boy with the world before him. And Sidney Colvin was already a distinguished man of letters. Stevenson wrote to Mrs. Sitwell for years after that, and she would sometimes, if I could get her in the mood, read his letters to Stephen Phillips and me as we sat round the fire in the long winter afternoons, in that high formal room, with the London fog outside.

There was a great bronze plaque of Stevenson over the mantelpiece. It was the most important object in the room. He was sitting in a chair, his profile toward us, with long, lank hair falling over his face, his figure bent and the head slightly drooping.

The thing I noticed most of all was his lovely hands. The grace of them, and the power, those hands that gave so much of beauty and romance and strength to the world! He was constantly ill, but his spirit and energy was undaunted.

Whenever I read anything of Stevenson's I can imagine those long, slender hands writing—writing until the pen fell from his fingers with pain. They could only belong to a poet, those hands.

Sidney Colvin told me that he placed some of Stevenson's first articles for him, and was his devoted friend and adviser until he died.

I loved the Colvins very dearly, and I know they loved



me, almost more than if I had been their child, and they taught me the splendour of achievement and told me of the intimate life of the great ones and their magnificent struggles before success came to them. Their friendship was a great incentive and made me long to do serious and worthy work.

## CHAPTER XVIII

EACH day, when I left "The Monument" and the iron gates of the stately old Museum closed after me, I would walk round to my flat in Shaftesbury Avenue. I had brought my family "over the water" at last to live in dignified London. We thought it a great step up.

Never shall I forget my first West End flat.

We did not know much about the districts in those days, Mother and I, and we hit on this cosy little apartment at the top of a very high corner building. The rent was low, and we thought we had a marvellous bargain.

It was a grand day when we packed up, and the two small vans, or rather covered carts, came over Waterloo Bridge to fetch our few belongings, that had to be hauled up flights and flights of stairs to the garret (that is all you could call it) under the slanting roof that was our first West End flat.

We were like pilgrims setting forth to find their El Dorado. No people were ever so happy as Mother and I the day we "moved in."

We had two little bedrooms, so small you could hardly turn round in them, one for my mother and father, and one for me; and a boxroom for our one retainer, an elderly charwoman, who faithfully followed us from Kennington Road. A sitting-room with the roof slanting towards two slits of windows we thought so artistic when we first saw them.

But, oh, those windows—and that roof!

It was so near the sky that in the winter which followed we nearly froze to death, and in the summer it seemed to attract the sun like a magnet. The windows were so

small that not a breath of air could pierce them ; but on windy nights, as the flat was at a corner, the draughts nearly blew us into the street. There was a kitchen next to the sitting-room, so constructed that every bit of cooking hung in the air the entire day long.

The district we hit on too was very unfortunate. It was really a continuation of the Seven Dials, where the Dials suddenly burst out and called themselves Shaftesbury Avenue.

It is now changed, and one can hardly believe it to be the same place. A gin-palace decorated every corner ; and regularly each Saturday night, at twelve o'clock, men and women would be thrown out into the street by the " chuckers-out," knocking over a few perambulators in their enforced exits, and the poor babies would sprawl in the gutter ! The screams and howls that ensued will live in my memory for ever.

There was an open door leading to our flats that was supposed to be locked at twelve o'clock ; but it was always on the latch ! No one could ever be found who was responsible for closing it. When the public-houses emptied, anybody who had nothing else to do—and no particular place to go—would drop in and have a nap on our stairs.

Added to this, I suppose we struck the most immoral house in London ! Ladies of easy virtue occupied most of the other flats.

When I came home from His Majesty's, having enacted the romantic and elegant Roma, I would pick my steps over the drunken gentlemen slumbering peacefully on our staircase. As I mounted and mounted, the doors of the flats would open slightly, and furtive eager faces of women—with more make-up on than I ever wore on the stage—peeped out. There were looks of great disappointment when they saw who it was, and the doors would snappily close again. I got used to this. I would ring the lower bell, and Mother would lean over the balustrade at the top until I had reached our haven. Often I would

be pursued by some amorous gentleman who encountered me in the gas-lit hall. He would forget his destination and follow me up until he met my mother's glare at the top and was told, if he didn't make off quickly, she would fetch a policeman. He would then scuttle hurriedly down the stairs, apologizing for his mistake. Her threat was always effective; though had my admirers stopped to think a moment they would have known we could not possibly have kept a private policeman concealed in that flat. There wasn't room!

What a dreadful place it was! But Mother and I were too proud to admit to each other that we had made a mistake—a mistake of sheer snobbery.

Often we pined for Borret Road, where the honest workman came home from his hard day's work and was too tired to look at a girl. His manners may have been a little inelegant, but, oh, how I longed for the sight of a good clay pipe and a tankard of honest beer instead of those terrible ghouls of the half-world! But, alas, salaries were small; we had signed the lease and we could not get out of it. However, it was a great experience, and I used it later when I played Nancy Sykes. I learnt my gin-soaked voice that people were so impressed by from those Saturday night brawls.

If I had been ashamed of Borret Road, I was ten times more ashamed of having people see where I lived in those days. I didn't mind my intimate friends—they understood and laughed at my embarrassment. Stephen Phillips used to say, when he came to see me, he felt like Orpheus passing through the beckoning sirens on his way to find Eurydice in Elysium.

He assured me he never looked back!

One of the most tragic experiences of my life happened in that apartment. We had been out to supper one night, my mother and I, and it must have been about one o'clock when we put the key in the latch. We usually went straight to our bedrooms, but something told me to open the sitting-room door. There was no light in the

room, except from the window, which let in a little bit of moon. To our utter amazement, Dan Leno was sitting on the sofa ! I had never met Dan Leno, but I had adored him from afar since I was a little girl. My mother had taken me to see him in every successive pantomime in the following years. He was the greatest star in London at that time, certainly the most brilliant comedian I have ever seen, and he had an amazing quality of pathos. His eyes were beautiful, like the eyes of a wounded animal or a great tragedian. They were deep-sunken and looked as if they would fill with tears at any moment. They were like Mrs. Patrick Campbell's eyes. His voice was low and husky and he was small and delicate looking, with a very slender and fragile body.

This sounds a ridiculous description of a man who made the whole world laugh. My mother and I quoted Dan Leno from morning till night. We simply adored him. I would go to the music-halls or pantomime where he was playing and see him do the same things time after time—and never get tired. Whatever character he undertook he made absolutely human and consistent. His jokes were never vulgar or banal. Some of the things he said were amazing bits of philosophy besides being screamingly funny. He was so wistful, and one always felt the pathos behind his humour. He was "Pierrot"—never "Clown."

You can imagine our astonishment to find our idol sitting there in that little room ! No announcement, no preliminaries—nobody sitting up to explain the reason of his presence. Just Dan Leno sitting there in the darkness and the moonlight.

The maid told us next day he had arrived at 10.30 and had waited all that time.

When I came towards him, he took my hand eagerly. He was trembling with excitement. My mother was standing behind him, laughing from sheer pleasure at seeing him, and I was smiling too. We were utterly amazed ! As he began to speak something in his face

arrested me, and I frowned at my mother. Then began the most pathetic half-hour, almost, I can remember.

I sensed something alien in his manner, and those tragic eyes, when I looked into them, were full of deep sorrow. There was no comedian here! Without any preliminaries he burst into his life story. Whether it was the true one or not I have no means of verifying, but this is how he told it to me.

He said he was the son of a Scottish marquis, and that his mother had been a housemaid in his father's great mansion somewhere in the north. He was nine years old when he tramped up to London with her, and they walked all those miles in the bitter winter. He sang outside village public-houses for a few coppers to get their food, and they ate snow to quench their thirst as they tramped along the frozen roads! It took them nearly a month to get down from Scotland, walking all the way.

He told me of his life of direst poverty in London, of his struggles until he began to be known and fame came to him at last. All the time he was holding my hand in the most painful grip. My arm was nearly paralysed. And then he told me the ambition of his life was to play Shakespeare, and that he had the most profound admiration and friendship for Sir Henry Irving. He had seen everything he had done for many years, and for the past six months he had watched me in "Ben Hur" and "Ulysses" and "The Eternal City," time after time, sitting in the gallery or at the back of the pit with his collar turned up so that few would recognize him. How excited they would have been had they known they were sitting next to their idol! He said he had saved up enough money to fulfil the ambition of his life—he wanted me to make a contract to play in Shakespeare with him for five years.

I shall never forget that night. We hadn't lit the gas, as it all happened so suddenly. The moonlight was shining on his face; his body was trembling and his hands were icy cold. I realized, as he spoke, something



strange had happened to him. He talked rapidly, as if some flood-gate had been opened and that wild, tragic heart of his was speaking the truth at last.

Some time before he had played a scene from "Richard III" at a *matinée*. I wasn't present, but many people told me that he had started seriously, but when people began to laugh he had turned it into a joke. Now, looking at him, I knew his ambition to be a true one. Some strange barrier had been let down in his brain and he was speaking out—at last.

The situation was impossible. What could I do? Here I was, at the height of my career at His Majesty's. If I had said yes he might have taken the story to the newspapers, and even though he was unbalanced the report might have been published, and I could never have lived down the tragicomic situation that I was to play for five years with Dan Leno in Shakespeare!

I didn't know what to do. There was no telephone in my flat; I couldn't get help from anybody, and I knew he was very ill. I took him down the stairs and told him to see Herbert Tree in the morning at the theatre. I thought if I put him off in this way I should be able to explain to Sir Herbert and get him to help me.

When we got downstairs there was an old coachman, sitting on the box of a one-horse brougham, smoking a pipe, waiting for him. He drove off quite happily, relying on my promise. I felt a traitor as I stood there watching the carriage drive away. I shall never forget his little, eager face as he looked out of the window at me. He was so content, so radiantly happy that he was to play the great rôles—Richard III and Hamlet! I felt somehow I was betraying him. I think I was the first person to whom he ever really told that secret ambition—the innermost hope of his heart.

I got to rehearsal early next morning, but Dan Leno was before me. He had been there for about two hours. Lots of people were standing about the stage door, members of the company, stage hands, etc., all with

grinning faces. Everybody loved Dan Leno. The door-keeper had an odd look on his face—a cross between puzzlement and delight. He instinctively felt the strangeness in Dan Leno's manner, although he was making everybody scream with laughter. He had insisted on giving the old man money to buy himself a silk top hat to wait on Sir Herbert and me. The others were very amused, but the door-keeper was a wise old man !

Dan Leno had been busy making several imaginary contracts with the smaller members of the company, writing them out carefully on bits of paper and signing them ! He had given handfuls of money to the paper-boys in the Haymarket, who were delightedly crowding round the stage door, watching his every antic, thinking he was doing it all for fun.

We were rehearsing a serious one-act play at the time, "The Man Who Was," and I was the heroine. Sir Herbert was not at rehearsal, and I had been unable to communicate with him or tell him of my fears, but I managed to get hold of the call-boy and asked him to warn Sir Herbert, as he came in, that I thought Mr. Leno was very ill. He seemed so well in health and was so amusing that the call-boy asked me to repeat my message.

Then followed an agonizing half-hour.

While I was rehearsing, wherever I went Dan Leno accompanied me. If I sat down, he sat too ; if I stood, he stood beside me ; if I walked, he was at my side. The company giggled wildly, thinking it a huge joke.

Presently Sir Herbert appeared with his manager. The call-boy had given him my message. He made a sign to me and took Dan Leno into the stalls to talk matters over, and we continued to rehearse.

Then a strange time followed. I could see Dan Leno and Sir Herbert in the empty stalls, talking and talking—staring into each others' eyes. Our theatre manager was with them, but Tree sent him away on some errand or other. (I afterwards found he had sent for Mr. Leno's

manager to come and take care of him.) When those two had been together a little while the strangest part of the whole thing happened. As they talked down there in the stalls, with the key light from the stage shining on them, Dan Leno gesticulating and explaining, Herbert Tree was the one who seemed to be growing gradually mad.

The leant towards each other, face to face, excitedly nodding and agreeing. Tree's red hair was standing on end, his blue eyes blazing with excitement. It was an odd picture, those two white faces—those geniuses of the theatre—down there in the dimness.

What a thin borderline: how fine the thread! How near akin are madness and genius? Who can tell?

Presently the manager appeared with two men, and Dan Leno shook hands and went away quite happily.

When Sir Herbert came on the stage he beckoned me towards him and said he feared something was seriously wrong—we hardly dared speak that dreadful word between us. He was very pale and his eyes were sunken—the fading light of inspiration was on his face, as if he had seen a vision that was past. He was silent for a moment, staring into space. Then he said:

“If this is madness, what is the use of being sane? If ever he plays Richard III—it will be the greatest performance of the part we have seen.” Then he pulled himself together and looked at the people on the stage. “Let's get back to work. How dull normal people are!”

We had a late rehearsal that afternoon and other things crowded my mind, but when I got home about five o'clock what was my amazement to find Dan Leno awaiting me. He had eluded his manager with that strange cunning of a twisted mind. He had a jewel-case in his hand with a diamond plaque. The stones were wonderful—it was a very valuable piece. He loved jewels, I believe, and always bought them. I was foolish enough to refuse the plaque.

He told me that Tree had agreed to all the terms, and

there was nothing left but to sign the contract, and he would send the information to the papers.

I didn't know what to do—I didn't realize that Sir Herbert had warned the papers not to publish any statement that might be sent in regarding my future appearances; I didn't want the story to get out! I fenced with Mr. Leno for a little while, and then refused the offer. I have never seen such crushing disappointment on anybody's face as he said:

"You don't believe that I can play Shakespeare, then?"

I tried to explain that there were other reasons, but it was no good, and he left me with the tears pouring down his face.

He gave the diamonds to a barmaid on his way home, who insisted on regarding them as a gift. She would not return them when they tried to prove that he was not responsible for his actions. I ought to have kept the jewels for his family.

Two days afterwards he was taken to a nursing-home. Perhaps he would have been a great Shakespearean actor. Who can tell? He certainly knew more about Shakespeare than many who act him and make names for themselves.

I never spoke to Dan Leno again, but I saw him in one pantomime when he came back for a brief while. He had to fulfil his contract or forfeit a great deal of money, and he had many people dependent on him.

The magic was quite gone; he wasn't very funny and seemed aloof from everything. Then later I saw him in a music-hall, when he was almost the last item on the bill. The people were hurrying to catch their late trains and buses. They didn't laugh at him any more; they were impatient and pitiful.

He looked bewildered, as if he didn't understand why the audience didn't laugh. I wish he had never come back! He died soon after.

## CHAPTER XIX

**D**URING the long run of "The Eternal City" I heard that Mercury wasn't doing very well in America. He was in debt and out of work. It worried me very much, as I felt it was on my account that he had been sent out of England. I wasn't in love with him, but I felt responsible, and told Herbert Tree of the rumour. He was as concerned as I. He hated anything that savoured of injustice. About a fortnight later he called me into his room and said that Julian L'Estrange was on the sea, coming home.

Without a word to me, he had cabled to Charles Frohman, in New York, to find him, pay his debts and book his passage home.

These were the things Herbert Tree did. He had the "grand gesture"; he was magnificent in his generosity.

The relief to me was tremendous. I didn't see Mr. L'Estrange, but heard that he was engaged to be married, and the episode of our meeting on Mount Olympus remained in my mind as a vague and charming memory.

To divert for a moment and explain a phase of Herbert Tree's character.

This little episode is so typical.

He had a manager whom everybody liked enormously. He was a great gambler and there had been some scandal regarding a card debt. He would have got into serious difficulties if Sir Herbert hadn't liked him and insisted upon giving him a very responsible financial position at His Majesty's.

This was a cruel kindness, as he was in constant tempta-



tion, as most of the finances of the theatre went through his hands, but he was remarkably helpful to everybody and was in the theatre for several years.

One day he gambled very heavily, and foolishly confiscated some money to pay his debt. It was a momentary impulse, and rather a clumsy one.

He had no criminal intention at all, but for the sake of the prestige of the theatre Sir Herbert had to prosecute him. So detectives were called in and a great fuss was made.

But Sir Herbert secretly sent for the manager, and financed his escape, and supported him abroad until he died.

It was a ridiculous situation, as he also had to pay for the detectives who were searching for him.

When the season came to an end we all went to Dieppe for the summer—Mother and I, the William Nicholsons and their children, Max Beerbohm, the Orpens and several others.

We stayed in a tiny little hotel, very clean and cheap and away from the sea-front. Whistler had discovered it years before, and had gone there ever since. I remember he came that summer for a little while, and overawed us all. There was a reverential silence when the great man came into the dining-room. I could hardly eat for staring at him and trying to listen to every word he said.

Our party took up practically the whole hotel. We paid very little for our rooms; about twelve francs a day, including wonderful food. No outsider was allowed to book rooms unless their names were submitted to us; it was like a private club.

Walter Sickert lived in a villa up the hill.

He and Max were great friends. It was amusing to see them sitting outside a café, drinking their bock, one so neat and debonair, his collar very high, and abnormally tight cuffs, a one-sided tilt to his hat and his sensitive hands crossed on his ebony and ivory cane, which he



had leaned on or sucked thoughtfully, with his enormous dreaming eyes, with their curly lashes, looking ahead as if they constantly saw some vision nobody else was permitted to see.

Max appeared never to notice anything, yet he was the most observant person I knew.

He was a living contradiction. His manner was gently courteous, almost old-fashioned, yet his mind was far ahead of his time. He was so exquisite and neat that he made other people feel clumsy—me especially. My feet and hands felt too large.

Of course he was the most enchanting companion. Words had colour when Max talked. He was fond of elaborate jokes too, and would take a great deal of trouble over them. One night he took me to the little theatre in Dieppe, where a visiting French company were playing. Mme. Granier was the lead. We had been discussing, in the afternoon, the lack of understanding sometimes shown by an audience, and how awful it was for an artist when the public laughed in the wrong place.

I didn't know a word of French, but he told me the plot of the play as we went to the theatre and, in whispers, as we sat in the stalls. He described it as a drama, and although there was a great deal of laughter in the course of the performance he assured me that this was a case in point that the holiday visitors could not understand or appreciate the pathos of the plot!

So great was Max's power of suggestion that I got seriously annoyed at their interruptions during the evening. The artists' gestures coincided with the story he told me, and he kept it up the whole evening with the utmost gravity. He nearly made me cry.

During supper with some of our friends I discovered the play was high comedy with a totally different plot and the audience were right.

Walter Sickert was very different and very picturesque. He looked as if he had stepped out of a page of "*La Vie de Bohème*." He wore very baggy trousers in some

bright colour, rather long hair, a *béret* on his head, and a flowing tie. He was rather fierce when you first met him.

He ought to have been gentle according to his looks, but one soon got over that. He was a charming friend to the people he liked.

There were lots of other celebrities. Marie Tempest and her husband, Cosmo Lennox, were staying in the town itself. John Barrymore, Gerald du Maurier and the Esmonds were in some other part of Dieppe. Tree came over from London for a day or two, to meet Maeterlinck, who had a villa near. He was then writing "The Blue Bird." Herbert Tree was negotiating with him for the production, which unfortunately he—later—refused. Coquelin was there also—the most delightful, kind and fascinating companion.

It was amusing on the *plage* in the mornings. We would bathe and have our "aperi" at the tiny bar of "Madame Sandwich," at the corner, then drive through the Forest of Arc to the little farm called "Matins L'Eglise." We had our *déjeuner* by the side of a rippling stream, with the sun making patterns on the coloured tablecloths through the branching trees, and some one, somewhere, tinkling away on a guitar, lazily singing some little French song—in the noonday heat!

The ducks and goats and chickens and rabbits would walk about amongst us, very friendly. They would take our food off the table if we didn't watch them. The patron caught the trout fresh out of the stream for us.

I was always very sorry for the poor trout, but managed to eat my share when they came sizzling to the table—with long rolls of bread—and delicious butter and coffee! What glorious mornings! A sense of well-being and physical fitness. Brilliant, witty people, not trying to be clever, just having fun!

I wish I had kept those tablecloths with the sketches and caricatures and scrawls of poetry!

Some collector would pay a lot of money for them

now. But I suppose they went to the *blanchisseuse*, and she was quite unconscious of the masterpieces she washed away in that sunny stream.

I was engaged to Max. We hadn't much money, but we hoped to be married in the following year.

## CHAPTER XX

THEY were doing another production at His Majesty's in the autumn in which there was no part for me, but Stephen Phillips was writing a new play in which I was to appear the following spring.

The actors under contract who were not wanted for the current production were formed into a repertory company, which was the foundation of the Shakespeare festival which afterwards took place at His Majesty's every year.

We went on a long tour. I played Viola, Trilby and Portia in "Julius Cæsar" in the repertory. It was a magnificent company—Oscar Asche and Lionel Brough (then an old man) and Lyn Harding! A very good star cast for a touring company. But we weren't all stars then, though Mr. Asche had played a great deal in London and was considered the head of the company.

Julian L'Estrange was engaged to play my double in "Twelfth Night." We looked so much alike that it was sensational, although he was much taller than myself. We were glad to see each other again. We hadn't met since his return from America until the rehearsals started. On our first performance of "Twelfth Night" he sent me some flowers with a little card with "Journeys end in lovers' meeting" written on it; but he made no other sign and we remained good friends for many months.

Then exciting things began to happen. The tour was prolonged as the new play was not ready. Comyns Carr had written a play on Dickens' "Oliver Twist," which Herbert Tree flirted with but had not decided to produce. I loved the play, and told Mr. Carr that, in the event of

it not being done at His Majesty's, I would take an option on it. This seemed to stimulate Sir Herbert's interest, as he thought it unusual for a young actress to want to invest her hard-earned salary in a play. However, he didn't want me for the part of Nancy. It was a totally different kind of part from any I had ever played before. I had never acted a character with a cockney accent; I had always played goddesses or empresses or romantic heroines at His Majesty's, and, strangely enough, Sir Herbert would never let me play comedy. But I felt I could tackle Nancy.

Mr. Carr was on my side, and I begged Sir Herbert to let me try. We won the day, and in the end it was decided to try the play in London on the last night of the season. It would be a grand finale to end with a new production before His Majesty's closed for the summer; it could do no harm one way or the other. Nobody but Tree would have dreamt of such an expensive and fantastic idea as putting on a new play for one night.

The tour had closed a few weeks before, and so many of the company could play. The producing was left, more or less, to Comyns Carr.

Sir Herbert didn't take much interest in it; consequently it cost about a quarter the usual price of a production at His Majesty's. Sir Herbert liked Fagin very much, and he came to rehearsals and amused himself with thinking out the business of the characterization, and as he was relieved of the responsibility of the production he could give more attention to his own part. But sometimes, if he felt specially energetic, he would take the rehearsals. He was a hard taskmaster and very determined about any effect he wished to produce. And he worked untiringly at some small point until it was perfect.

I have been made to rehearse the same little scene over and over again, perhaps thirty times.

It was marvellous training, and absolutely destroyed self-consciousness. When I was reduced to floods of

tears he would say to me, "Now then, now there is no more Constance Collier, let's find out how to act the part," and I would build up a true character out of the wreck of my ego.

Young actresses do not know the meaning of such hard training. I have never been so grateful for anything in my life.

I remember I had to do a very difficult backward fall in "Oliver Twist." Nancy runs forward to strike Fagin, and Bill Sykes knocks her backwards. It was a hard thing to do, as the blow had to appear to be right in my face.

Lyn Harding, the gentlest of men, had rehearsed this scene with me one day for about an hour and a half, and I had fallen and fallen as his fist went past my face within about a quarter of an inch. To the company looking on it appeared as if the blow really hit me. Still it didn't satisfy Sir Herbert, who said we should get the effect to within an eighth of an inch. We were both very tired, and poor Lyn Harding's fist slipped, and he really did hit me full in the face. I fell to the floor with a thud, half stunned. When I could pull myself together I got up with the blood streaming down my mouth and my teeth nearly knocked out.

Tree, his artistic sensibility overshadowing all else, said: "There—that is the effect we want to get."

I shall never forget poor Lyn Harding's horror. He rushed out and bought me a huge bunch of violets, and I went about for a week with a purple eye and a swollen lip.

Another thing I had to do was the scream at the end of the murder scene. I knew this was to be one of the best effects of my performance, but I shirked it at every rehearsal and kept putting it off. At last Sir Herbert insisted on my trying it.

He turned everybody out of the theatre except the people directly concerned, and I began to imagine Saturday nights in Shaftesbury Avenue. I let myself go, and





AS 'NANCY' WITH MARIE DORO AS 'OLIVER' IN 'OLIVER TWIST'



screamed and screamed at the top of my voice as the blows descended on poor Nancy's agonized body. Tree put his hands over his ears, and a charwoman who was washing down the stairs came flying through the swing-door and said: "My God, what's happened?"

Sir Herbert was delighted. He burst out laughing and said: "We've got it; that's all right."

That scream, later on, had the same effect on the audience. We were always having people fainting or being carried out.

Herbert Tree knew the psychology of an audience so well. The play had been written for Nancy to be killed on the stage, in a very long dramatic scene. He said the only way was to have the murder take place off, as an audience could never be convinced that the person they were looking at was really dead—it destroyed illusion—but the minute they couldn't see the actor one could stir their imagination and make them believe anything.

I was heart-broken to think that my big scene was to be cut out, and thought it very unjust; but, oh, how right he was! That unearthly scream, the sound of the thuds of Bill Sykes's club as he beat Nancy to death, and the white face of Fagin, staring through the open door with the moonlight shining in his eyes—conveyed everything! The spectators saw the murder in Fagin's face as he slowly blew the candle out and the curtain came down. They were left shuddering! There was never any applause for the scene until a minute after the curtain had descended, and then it lasted till the curtain went up on the next act. But I never took a call, as it spoilt the illusion of Nancy's death for the rest of the play.

We had the greatest difficulty in finding the proper effect for Bill Sykes's club that crushed poor Nancy's body. In the end, after trying everything, we got it by accident one day with a huge stack of books and a stick with a wet rag tied on. It was most realistic; it sounded exactly like a club descending on flesh and blood. I

remember amongst the stack of books were the complete works of Balzac, that had been bought at some second-hand shop. It wasn't a very good edition, but little did Balzac know to what use his works would be put!

Lyn Harding and I acted the entire scene off stage exactly as if we were doing it in front of an audience. We tried doing it standing still, but we could get nothing at all; so the back of the stage was cleared, and he threw me down off stage as realistically as if the entire theatre could see us.

Fagin was one of Tree's greatest triumphs. He did marvellous and dreadful things. In the den scene his heel crushed an imaginary black beetle—one could almost hear it squelch. So great was his power of suggestion that, when in the far corner of the den he saw the glittering green eyes of a rat, and shooed it away, the audience were convinced they had seen a real rat scuttle to its hole. They would ask me if it was alive or a mechanical device. But there was nothing there, of course, but Tree's imagination!

One of the biggest successes in the play was Sykes's dog. He was a white bull-terrier, very ferocious looking, but as mild as a lamb. He adored Lyn Harding, and never left his side. That dog was a superb actor. When Bill shouted at him he would crouch down and give a sideways look and slink off the stage, and you could hear the audience say, "Oh, poor thing!"—and in the wings he would wag his tail and look delighted if he had played well. When the scene was over he would rush out of the theatre, cross the road, push his nose through the swing-door of the public-house, jump on a stool and have a drink of beer and a biscuit. The barman expected him, and it was his regular habit. He added a tremendously sinister note to Lyn Harding's performance, but his adoration for his master was his death.

They were out for a walk one day. The dog crossed the road and looked back over his shoulder for Lyn Harding, who had stayed on the pavement. The dog

started back through the traffic to rejoin him—and was killed! We were all heart-broken. We were very fond of him, and he was a great loss to the company. We despaired of ever finding another to take his place.

But Lyn Harding had a way with dogs; another bull-terrier was found, and in two days he knew his part—and played it very well. But he was a comedian and gave quite a different performance. When Lyn Harding shouted at him on the stage, he would wag his tail and grin, as much as to say, “You don’t mean this, it’s all bluff,” and the audience would scream with laughter. When Bill Sykes ordered him off the stage, threatening to strike him, he would bounce across like an india-rubber ball, in the gayest of spirits, and get a round of applause for his exit. But the drama of the scene was gone. However, he played to the end of the run and, I believe, lives on Lyn Harding’s farm to this day, a very old gentleman as dogs go.

We all three had a great success. Lyn Harding as Bill Sykes was terrifying. Tree was such a generous actor, and so anxious for the success of everybody else in his theatre, that he had none of the star feeling, which is so despicable. He said the three parts should be played as if they belonged to one entity—Fagin the brain, Bill the body, and Nancy the heart. Herbert Tree taught one to act by his power of suggestion.

The play was a triumph.

The plans for the future season were abandoned, and “Oliver Twist” was put on the following autumn, and ran for a whole year. It was constantly being revived and was one of the stand-bys of His Majesty’s theatre.

During its long run many exciting things happened. After about three months Sir Herbert began to tire, more or less, of Fagin, as he always did of any part he had to play for a considerable time. His brain was so active he wanted to get at something else; therefore he amused himself by playing tricks on the company.

He carried a dreadful sack over his shoulder in his

first entrance. I shall never forget that sack—the things that came out of it! He emptied it in front of me, and I, as Nancy, was supposed to be terrified of my cruel master.

How I dreaded that sack!

I had to hold my expression facing the audience. Sometimes he would produce a perfectly new pair of patent leather boots, which he put on and played the entire scene in, and, with his long red hair and beard and torn gaberdine, they looked ridiculous! He did this quite seriously, and the audience hadn't any idea it wasn't part of the play. Sometimes he would produce a tiara, which he tried on my head, or there would be a kitten, and one night he had a rabbit. It was amazing how he managed to work it all into the scene and make it seem part of the play. What I went through in my struggle not to laugh! I have always been very conscientious about that sort of thing on the stage, and I hate to see other people doing it, but he would do everything in his power to break down my determination.

I remember, one night, begging him not to tease me as some important people were in front and I wanted to give an especially good performance, but he came on, as Fagin, with an exquisite little bouquet of spring onions, which he presented to me. The audience didn't know what it was, but it was absolute torture to me during the scene to try and control my temper and my desire to laugh. He was full of mischief and high spirits always, and his theatre was a joyous and inspiring place; one never minded the hard work because it was all so gay and light-hearted.

I remember once, in the middle of my big scene as the pompous Roma, as he embraced me, he undid the entire back of my dress, and I had to exit backwards. I quarrelled with him badly for this. I didn't speak to him for several days, and looked him straight in the face when we met with a cold and glassy eye to make him understand my displeasure. But he was irrepressible.



As Baron Bonelli, the evil genius of poor Roma, he had to confront me suddenly in a most dramatic scene. I looked up, and there he stood—a magnificent dignified figure, the great diplomat, covered with decorations, his face sinister and hawk-like—and a spangle on the tip of his nose. What could I do? I had to smile—and the quarrel was over.

But he met his Waterloo in Ellen Terry, who was just as playful as he was on the stage. It was when they were acting "The Merry Wives of Windsor." As Falstaff, Tree wore a rubber suit, which was blown up like a bicycle tyre for the enormous size necessary for Falstaff. It was a continuous duel between Ellen Terry and Herbert Tree as to who should get the better of the other. They would think out elaborate jokes.

They had so much charm that their gaiety and irresponsibility seemed to infect the audience and make the play go better than ever. They didn't remember many of their words, but their performance was so enchanting that the audience didn't miss them. But one day the joke went too far. Ellen Terry took a hat-pin and stuck it into Falstaff's enormous belly at the beginning of a long scene. The effect was fantastic. Falstaff slowly began to deflate, and when the scene ended he came off with his clothes hanging in festoons round him, very thin and angry. He had been hoist with his own petard indeed.

Ellen Terry was nowhere to be seen. She had locked herself in her dressing-room.

All this sounds frivolous and trivial, but, somehow, little things have stuck in my mind through all these years—amusing, strange little things that perhaps are not funny to other people. I can't remember the great events, or how I became an important personage, or any of the milestones (steps that mark career), but little intimate things—the small, trivial details of my friends and comrades—seem to live in my heart and make me love them more than their greatness.

## CHAPTER XXI

I NEVER can make up my mind whether to believe in luck, whether it really does exist or not, but we had wonderful examples of it at His Majesty's.

Herbert Tree was proverbially lucky—he believed in his luck, he was quite confident about it. Comyns Carr was proverbially unlucky; he was almost boastful about it too.

When “*Oliver Twist*” was put on for the autumn run, on the first night, during the opening act, we heard a curious clicking sound, like a little hammer beating on iron—it was most irritating. I was on the stage playing a scene with Fagin. I saw the stage manager in the wings, very pale and haggard, gesticulating wildly. We didn't understand it was meant for us; we thought it was just over-anxiety. However, luckily, Tree mistook his cue and cut out half the scene, and the curtain came down three minutes earlier than it should have.

The stage manager almost fainted, and told us the noise we had heard was the iron curtain descending. If it had passed a certain notch it couldn't have been raised except with outside help and the audience would have had to be dismissed. Men were set to work, and were able to stop its further descent just in time, and the situation was saved. Had Tree remembered the entire scene it would have been disastrous. Comyns Carr was convinced it was his evil fate; but Herbert Tree's luck was stronger—so he forgot his lines and saved the situation.

We had been running two or three weeks, very successfully, when the County Council came to the theatre for

their periodical examination and discovered the proscenium arch was cracked, and the theatre must be closed immediately as it was a public danger and might fall on the actors. Such a thing had never been known to happen before.

We were ordered to close that very night, in the first weeks of an enormous success. But Tree's good genius was at work again. The Schubert brothers had built a theatre in London and put on a play which was withdrawn unexpectedly the same evening. Sir Herbert, with his usual decision, announced he would transfer the company, and we opened the following night at the Schubert Theatre, while His Majesty's was repaired. We stayed three months and then moved back to our theatre. So it showed that Tree's good fortune was stronger than Comyns Carr's ill luck, for which we were all very thankful.

To diverge a moment and prove my point. I remember driving with Sir Herbert one day to lunch with Marie Corelli. He liked to go at top speed, and the chauffeur, striving to please him, swerved the car and tipped sideways into a ditch. We were in the depths of the country, very late for our engagement, and our plight seemed hopeless. Suddenly we heard the strange "chuck-chuck" of a steam-roller in the lane close by. Ropes were tied to the car, and the steam-roller hauled us out. Tree was convinced that his guardian angel had put it there, not to repair the road, but so that he could keep his appointment.

We were beginning to be a bit more prosperous, and found ourselves in a position to make another move and chance subletting our sordid little flat.

Mother found a tiny house at the top of Campden Hill. We had a bit of garden of our own, and it was very picturesque and quiet. On the day we moved in Sidney Colvin had given me a "Life of Leonardo da Vinci." It fascinated me. It was the first time I had read anything about him. I couldn't put it down.

When the great day came for us to go down those dreadful stairs for the last time and leave that flat behind, Mother and I were so thankful that we arrived at the empty house hours before the furniture vans!

I can see myself now, perched on the edge of the bath (there was nothing else to sit on) reading, reading, oblivious of the tramp of men, the sofas and tables and bedsteads that gradually piled up around us as the day wore on! I had glimpses of my mother's harassed face, but I was deaf to her entreaties and would not put my book down and attend to business. Somehow, that book and the house remained associated in my mind all through the happy years I lived there, though anything less like the magnificence of da Vinci it would be impossible to imagine. Still, I always thought of that house as "Leonardo," and always shall.

Just down the hill I could get into Kensington Gardens. I went for walks there in the mornings with my dogs and watched the children sailing their ships on the Round Pond, the very pond where Shelley is supposed to have made a five-pound note into a little boat—and sailed it away!

I loved to sit under those great chestnut trees, on a twopenny green chair, in the spring—with the birds singing, and the dim buzz of the traffic in the distance, and the babies playing and paddling in the Serpentine. Dogs are so funny in Kensington Gardens; they seem to take possession of the children and join in all their games. There is laughter in their barking. Everything is so jolly. The "Babies' Walk" is like a fashion parade. It is amazing where they come from, with their little round laughing faces!

Grown-ups—with no children—seem to be intruding.

I remember, one sunny morning, a long procession headed by a perambulator and followed by nurses with babies of all sizes and descriptions, some of them not more than two or three years old, toddling along. There was a great deal of excitement and chattering, and it was

quite a long procession. I asked one of the keepers what it meant. It was the baby son of the King and Queen of Spain being wheeled out for his airing, followed by his courtiers. The children had formed a procession to do him honour. I suppose the nurses had told the children about the little Spanish prince, for their chubby faces were aglow with enthusiasm as they tried to keep up with their elders. Babies never seem so enchanting anywhere as in Kensington Gardens. And—they belong to the morning.

We love kings and queens in England, and I hope we always shall. Whenever there is a pageant the crowd is happy and care-free and laughing.

I can't think why the world tries to eliminate splendour.

It doesn't help to do without it. People spend just as much money on individual extravagance. The poor, alas, are just as poor, and life is a good deal duller.

I have lived in democratic countries. They have processions too—tired gentlemen in top hats and patent leather shoes tramping through the streets, and nobody paying the faintest attention. But when the King and Queen drive through the streets in their glass coach to open Parliament, everybody, even the humblest, has a sense of pride—a feeling of possession.

I would walk to rehearsals—it was like a country walk! Right across Kensington Gardens, through Hyde Park along by Rotten Row, with the thud of the horses' hoofs rushing by me, past the great flower-beds. A mass of gorgeous blossoms! The sight of them refreshed me for the day. I would pause to watch the children feeding the ducks. All day long they feed them, and the ducks greet the recurring bags of crusts and bits of cake as if they had never had a morsel of food—they are so artful, those fat old ducks! Then across to the Green Park, past Buckingham Palace, along by Marlborough House.

If I were lucky I would see the changing of the Guard, or a troop of them riding along, scarlet and glorious, on



their prancing black horses with the sun shining on their brass helmets. Then I would come out in Pall Mall nearly at His Majesty's stage door.

How lovely London was, white-painted and green-doored, with gay flower-boxes in all the windows! So charming, so friendly! They have done away with the flower-boxes, and the world is too poor to waste money on delightful extravagances.

At night, after the play, I would drive home in a four-wheeler. I was afraid of hansoms, and the way the poor horses stuck their four hoofs together and slid down Piccadilly Hill!

I can't think why hansoms were invented. I suppose they were the most dangerous form of vehicle ever known. Two wheels, no brakes, and if you went down an incline the cab rested on the horse's tail! If the horse happened to be temperamental, it would kick out the splashboard! You would lean back as far as you could go to avoid its hoofs, then the glass would break. There you were, trapped, and you couldn't get out until the horse had got over its hysterics.

There was another awful thing about hansoms—the hole in the roof, which the cabby kept open the whole time. It was very disconcerting—as if God's eye were constantly upon you. In or out of season, hansom cabbies were proverbially cheerful, just as drivers of growlers were perpetually plunged in gloom. It was part of their stock in trade.

So home I would roll, curled up in a corner, rather sleepy, watching the shining streets, with the lamps like great oysters in the blurred, misty night.

Nowhere in the world do the streets shine as the London streets do. They are so lovely with the reflection of the lamps in them.

It is curious how London empties after six o'clock.

Bond Street—with only a few quiet pedestrians—like a theatre a quarter of an hour after the play is over and the audience have melted away, and the scenery stacked



on the empty stage, canvas side out. Every other city in the world where I have lived night and day are one, but in London the scene changes. It is wonderful to drive through the city at night with only the glistening streets ahead—not a soul to be seen! Past the Bank of England, through Throgmorton Street, where the commerce of the world goes on, where wars are financed and countries exploited in the busy mornings—and—when night comes—not a soul!

One feels as if life itself were resting after the day's turmoil. There is an extra stillness; even the old buildings seem asleep.

I often used to drive through the city at night after the theatre to find peace for my soul.

I had strange experiences with my correspondence at His Majesty's. I have received a great many letters from the public in the years I have been on the stage, and their attitude towards me has varied according to the part I played. In "Oliver Twist" my letters were extraordinary. Some of them were so indecent that my mail had to be opened by the manager before I was permitted to read it. Nancy was a woman of the streets, and the public write in response to the character rather than to the player. It is a peculiar subconscious reaction they have towards their favourites. If I were playing goddesses or duchesses there would be a certain deferential attitude towards me, even from the stage hands in the theatre. If, for instance, I was gorgeously robed and playing Cleopatra they would unconsciously make way for me; but in this character of Nancy, ragged and bedraggled, they would push me about with the scenery.

But something was happening to me. I suppose I wasn't intelligent enough to live up to the environment I found myself in. My brain began to tire. The sombreness of the British Museum oppressed me. I was becoming more and more conscious of my defects as an actress. I fidgeted about the tiniest detail and the value of a

syllable. I was losing the power of spontaneous emotion on the stage.

The things I had done so easily in those beginning years became a torture to me as my lapses from the true classical style were pointed out to me.

I began to dread the iron gates of the Museum opening. I became intolerant of the loving criticism of my friends and I swung to the other extreme. I couldn't bear them to correct me, even justly. Their dear affection and solicitude became irksome and irritating. I am afraid I hurt them very much, though I would not have done so for the world. But the time had come for me to be up and on the wing, and I had to go my own way. It has been the curse or virtue of my life—I don't know which—but, when the time comes, I must pull up my stakes and flee. Whither? Anywhere! Away! Away!

Stephen Phillips felt the strain too, I know, though we never spoke of it.

If he could only have retained the first young glory of "Marpessa" and "Christ in Hades"! He wrote them before he knew anybody. But, alas, he would take his pulsing, vibrant verse and read it aloud, and it would be whittled and criticized and cut about until the life had all gone out of it, and in places it became academic and stilted.

He was weaker than myself. His muse was enchained and entrapped and broken down by the adoration and admiration of the people who loved him and wanted to help him most.

Only once he spoke of it, as we stood together in the little street outside the Museum and looked up at the iron gates.

He whispered, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."

But I was beginning to rebel!

My fate—my glittering Harlequin—was preparing to leap upon the stage again and tap me on the shoulder and completely change the scene.

## CHAPTER XXII

**D**URING the run of "Oliver Twist" I got married. I don't know to this day how it came about, or why. Julian L'Estrange was playing Bassanio in "The Merchant of Venice," at the Garrick. And I was at His Majesty's. We were fond of each other, but with no idea of marriage, and used to lunch together sometimes. It was a great relief to be with somebody so beautiful and uncomplicated and with such a sense of humour.

I had decided never to marry. I felt I needed to be free and that career was the only thing that mattered, and I had broken all ties. I was quite convinced that an artist should have no ties. I had no desire to marry, absolutely no intention of it.

One day I was with Julian L'Estrange in a little restaurant in the Haymarket, and he handed me a paper. To my utter astonishment, I found it was a marriage licence.

I was indignant and furious, but he laughed at me.

I thought it the greatest piece of impertinence, as I had told him all along that I should never marry, and I imagined he had got over the idea in America; besides, he had been engaged to some one else in the interim. So, too, had I.

Then I thought he meant it as a practical joke, and I wanted to tear the paper up; but he took it away from me and said he quite understood my feelings, but he would keep it as a souvenir and reminder of his attempt and failure.

He agreed with me on every point, and we decided that of course it would be ridiculous to marry, and the subject was closed.

The licence was dated for three weeks ahead.

We met in the interval, but he never spoke of it until two days before the time was up, when he said :

“ You know you have an appointment with me on Thursday.”

He was laughing when he said it.

Again I was furiously indignant, and told him it was not a thing to joke about.

I awoke very early on the morning of the specified day with no more intention of being married than of going to Timbuctoo. But I was excited and nervous as if an unknown force was at work within me. I thought and thought, and suddenly I sprang out of bed and dressed myself.

Invisible chains seemed to drag me ! I was getting a dress made, which wasn't to be ready for two days, but I went to the dressmaker and implored her to give it to me as it was.

I was full of excitement by this time ; the adventure was beginning to thrill me, although I would not admit to myself that my mind was changing and I had any intention of going to the church.

My poor dressmaker was bewildered, but she was very fond of me and spoilt me a great deal. When I told her perhaps it was to be my wedding-dress she thought I was mad. But she pinned in my sleeves—there wasn't even time to tack them !

I hadn't definitely decided to go to the church until I got out into the street again, and then I was half an hour late.

Suddenly I made up my mind. I jumped into a cab. The church was empty except for three little choir-boys wriggling about in a back seat. They looked stunned when I appeared, and there was a good deal of whispering, but I did not notice them.

Julian was standing there quite unabashed, not in the least nervous.

It was three-quarters of an hour past the time by now,

and we were getting late for our matinées. He had signed the register in advance. I cried all through the ceremony, to the amazement of the clergyman; but Julian was laughing.

We went to our separate theatres and played our matinées. I wept all through the afternoon. I didn't know why I was crying, because I was very happy really, but I suppose it was the new adventure. I thought everything would be changed. I had been so independent all my life, able to have my own way in everything, head of the family since I was fourteen, and I dreaded the restraint of marriage. I thought of the sacrifices I should have to make and was terribly worried over the step I had taken.

My dresser, who had been with me for years, was very much concerned, and said :

"What has happened to you I don't know, but you will remember this afternoon all your life."

Little did she know how significant her words were.

Between the performances my one desire was to hide; I didn't care where. I was determined never to see Julian again. I could think of no place but the Turkish baths, where I could be absolutely concealed. I lay on the bed in the dressing-room and sobbed and sobbed, to the astonishment of the woman attendant. I refused to undress myself or go into the bath, and I would not explain why I was there, or what was the matter with me, and I wouldn't go away. I felt it was the one place where Julian could never find me. I wanted to stay there for the rest of my life. I waited until the last moment when I knew he would have to be in his theatre before going to His Majesty's for the evening performance. I hadn't told my mother. Oh, how I worried about that! I made up my mind to go straight home after the play and say nothing to her. I thought of instant divorce, annulment, anything! I hated what I had done.

By the end of the evening performance I was hysterical and almost delirious. I had had nothing to eat all day.



I got myself dressed as quickly as I could, intending to rush out of the theatre—but my husband was waiting for me at the stage door.

He took my arm gently without a word, and all my fears left me as I felt the grip of his kind hand. We drove to a little hotel where he had booked rooms. There was a bottle of red wine and some cold ham for our wedding supper. I was wholly unprepared. It was a strange wedding day. But how foolish I was about the whole thing! My marriage was very, very happy, and I gained a wonderful companion.

We thought we had kept the whole affair secret, but one of the three choir-boys happened to be walking-on at His Majesty's, and the news became known immediately.

I have never ceased to regret I hadn't told my mother. I am sure it hurt her terribly. We had been together in every adventure, and in the greatest adventure of all—I left her out! She never said a word. She loved Julian very much. He was a gay, beautiful and irresponsible person, and no one who met him could help being affected by his charm and kindness.

We grew fonder and more devoted to each other as the years went by.

His great-uncle was Edward FitzGerald, the poet. He had all the traits and characteristics of that dazzling Irish family, and their amazing charm and beauty. Had he been born a generation before he would have slung me over his saddle and ridden off with me; but modern existence isn't very suitable to the highly romantic type.

I don't think he was ever very satisfied with life; he was too intolerant of it.

He was as emotional and high-spirited as the best of his ancestors, and that is saying a great deal. He wrote charming verses. He was alternately gay and reckless or morbid and introspective—a true Irishman!

It was like living with an April day.

Marriage didn't affect me in the very least. I was



surprised it was so. I never got used to my married name. When people called me by it I hardly remembered to respond ; it seemed like another identity.

I still think it a mistake for people in the theatre to marry unless one of them is prepared to sacrifice their career. Sometimes husband and wife can act together, but such a combination is rare. Julian and I had to be parted so much that our marriage was like an intermittent love affair.

## CHAPTER XXIII

**T**HE next production at His Majesty's was "Nero"; a gorgeous production.

We had a terrible misfortune on the first night. The climax of the play was the burning of "Rome." Sir Herbert had taken months to prepare his great effect, and at the dress rehearsal it was wonderfully successful. The first night went splendidly until the final scene. We, Sir Herbert and myself as Nero and Poppæa, were on a kind of loggia; the panorama of Rome lay in the distance.

Here and there little sparks appeared as the fire broke out for the great final effect, which was the Burning of Rome.

Gradually the whole city began to burn, bursting into flames which mounted higher and higher as the curtain descended. I lay dead upon a couch; Nero stood watching the licking flames, reciting verses and playing upon his lyre. The moment came for the climax! Nothing happened. Tree began to get nervous, and so anxious was he to keep his eyes on his effect that his fingers never touched the strings of the lyre, but plucked away in mid air. Never a flame appeared—only a few pops and sparks! He grew frantic, twanging wildly at nothing and reciting his verses. I opened my eyes in my anxiety. Although I had been dead for some time this got a titter from the audience. Suddenly there was a loud explosion, and everything went up in soot as the curtain descended.

The stage manager lost his head and pulled the curtain up again in response to the sympathetic applause, and there we stood, smothered in blacks, like a couple of nigger minstrels.

All went well the second night, and the play was a great success.

Nero was not one of Herbert Tree's best rôles, but Lady Tree was quite wonderful in this play as Agrippina, and I think I had a great success too. Anyway, it was my performance as Poppæa that decided Herbert Tree to produce "Antony and Cleopatra." We discussed it during the run. It was a question of Antony or Macbeth for him, and he said he would rather play a man who died for love than for ambition.

After "Nero," in the spring, came another grand tour with Herbert Tree. We were very magnificent, with a private train and the royal coach attached. I had the Queen's suite, and I used to think of the days when I and my little dog Nellie were smuggled under a rug while my mother and her friend gossiped!

We would be met at the station by the mayor and officials, and there were formal banquets and receptions to be attended in the different towns, given in honour of Sir Herbert.

This sounds very snobbish, but I want to explain that Herbert Tree's position was almost an official one, and the great actors of that day were regarded as a serious part of the community.

"Oliver Twist" was added to the répertoire for Saturday nights, and of course "Trilby." I wore the same dress that Dorothea Baird wore in the original production fifteen years before. I think it is worn still in the revivals.

Répertoire is the ideal of every actor's heart. How I loved playing different parts every night instead of the deadly monotony of long runs.

That tour was my honeymoon. I remember Dublin best of all. Julian and I would get up early and breakfast at the strawberry beds just outside the town—by ourselves or with some of the younger members of the company. My gay and beautiful husband was in his native Ireland, and at his very best, full of charm and

light-heartedness. It wasn't because he belonged to me, but in those early days he was certainly the most lovely human being I had ever seen.

What enchanting people the Irish are, anyway, as companions!

The drivers of the jaunting-cars, the priests, the workers in the fields, all blessed with that divine gift of the gods—humour!

After the play Professor Mahaffy would entertain us. He had taken a great fancy to Julian and me, so we were privileged, young as we were, to be admitted to these special gatherings. What a privilege it was! There would be a few old cronies of the Professor's, some of the most brilliant wits in Ireland. We would go to his rooms or back to Sir Herbert's hotel for supper, and talk and talk all through the night; no bridge, no mahjong, no dancing—just talk.

It would probably be raining in the dirty old Dublin streets, but within that warm little room—what enchantment! The full mind of that wonderful old Irishman would people the world with heroes and supermen, and fire one with ambition to live greatly and to the uttermost. He was an inspiration.

I can see Julian's flushed, eager face as the Professor's deep voice rolled on. I can see Herbert Tree's lemon-coloured hair on end, his blue eyes twinkling with enjoyment, humour in the corners of his upturned mouth, and hear his gay, lisping voice arguing away. They had a marvellous effect on each other, those two. Herbert Tree was at his very best when he could cross his rapier-like mind with anyone of his own calibre. He wasn't so good with stupid people—he bewildered them, and they bored him.

Our departure from the city was wonderful. We drove down to the docks in jaunting-cars, talking, talking all the way, under the stars. The dear old man waved to us as we went up the gangway home to England.

I never saw him again.

I have never forgotten him.

All through the tour we had been preparing for the autumn production of "Antony and Cleopatra," studying and rehearsing, which was very hard work, and I was glad to get home for my summer rest before the great undertaking. I was dieting and exercising to get thin for the part, and was beginning to feel weak and tired.

I had a great friend in London about that time—Charles Frohman. How difficult to describe him—a little, fat, inarticulate man with piercing black eyes and amazing charm. He hadn't any culture, but a marvellous instinct for all things artistic. He never could explain what he meant, yet you understood him perfectly. He hardly ever finished a phrase, and trailed off into gesticulation, but his hands expressed everything. They were not beautiful hands, but quick and flexible. He lived by signs. He continually told plots of plays, generally beginning with the last act first, which added to the confusion. He had a bantering humour and often said very witty things—but in jerks, as though he were ashamed of them.

He was kindness itself to the people he liked, but very difficult with strangers. How he adored the theatre, and lived in it and for it, and nothing else ! C. F. was very much of a child. He was very fond of sweets. I never saw him drink anything but coffee or water or ice-cream sodas.

In the midst of a most important undertaking—a final dress rehearsal or a first night—he could be beguiled with a huge dish of chocolate ice-cream. He loved dogs, and had a great many in the country ; but he was so shy and reserved that I didn't find this out for years.

I suppose it was a secret sympathy between us, for I could have had a brilliant career as a kennel-maid.

C. F. was very eccentric in some of the things he did, but he never did them to get effects.

I went into his private office one day, with his staff and authors and anxious aspirants for parts waiting in

droves outside to see him, and there he sat, humped up at his huge desk—a small squat figure, like a young Buddha—important papers and manuscripts piled around him, eating an ice-cream and studying the Railway Guide!

I asked him what he was doing with the ABC, and he said he felt so tired that he needed a trip in the country, so he had read up the trains and imagined himself taking a journey to Cornwall.

He described the blue sea of Tintagel, and the waves breaking on the great rocks. He told me all about King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. He was there in thought, feeling the sea breezes on his face. Then he took the train back again (in his imagination) and felt rested and refreshed to face the day's work.

I don't believe he had ever been to Tintagel in his life.

I had never thought of the ABC as a romantic book before, but ever since it has had the enchantment of "Grimm's Fairy Tales" and "Gulliver's Travels," thinking of C. F.'s imaginary journeys.

The simplicity of greatness has always been an unexpected surprise to me. The ones who are designed to control destinies, I suppose, have got through all the second-rate complications of the half-way people and see life quite clearly.

No one except his intimate friends would believe the tender kindness of that unaffected little man, and yet he influenced so many lives. He was a king-maker, or rather a star-maker, and when he died most of his stars went behind the clouds.

On first nights he would stand in the crowd outside his own theatre to watch the audience come out and be moved on by the policemen.

He often invited me to his table at the Savoy Grill for lunch, when he was in London. And he loved London! It was a great privilege to be allowed to sit with him, so honour he only extended to a few, as he was the most-sought-after man in the theatre at that time.



It was remarkable, about that table. He sat there every day, and whether there was a conspiracy among the waiters I do not know, but nobody approached it unless C. F. wished them to. If he liked you, it was for ever ; he didn't change in his loyalty.

Any one of his adherents would have willingly worked for him for nothing if he had asked them to, but he never did. He was the soul of generosity. He made his investments in loyalty. He never had much money. All the dramatists and actors who worked for him adored him.

The best writers took him their plays before anybody else had a chance of seeing them, all on account of their affection for him ; therefore he was an extremely powerful force in the theatre, and had an unfair advantage over the other managers, which made them, perhaps, a little bit jealous. They envied his great and unassailable position. He really was an astonishing man. He never forgot a promise and never failed to give one the best of the bargain. He had a genius for friendship.

If anything went wrong I rushed to C. F. with my woes and told him all about them, and he was as interested and sympathetic as if my small grievances were the most vital things in the world to him.

I played for him for a long time in later years, and I never had a contract. He was better than his word !

He and Herbert Tree were the most important managers in London, but they did not get on very well. I longed to make them friends, I was so fond of them both. A fatal mistake to try and make one's friends friends, and I suppose their personalities were too forceful. Herbert's seeming affectations and C. F.'s eccentricities seemed to get on each other's nerves, although, behind their masks, they were equally sincere. It was no good—they were like flint and steel ; there was always a spark whenever they met.

I remember once, when Sir Herbert had sent C. F. an invitation to some banquet, which he refused, saying to Mr. Frohman that I thought it a little unkind, "As,

after all, Herbert Tree is the head of the profession." C. F. replied: "I am the foot, and that is just as important."

It was true—they were just as far apart as that. I think they would have been great friends if they had ever understood each other, but trifles seemed to come between them.

I used to go and lunch with C. F. and Hadden Chambers and a few of his special friends, with no more idea of going to America in my mind, in those days, than of flying the Atlantic. Little did I think that nearly half my life would be spent there.

## CHAPTER XXIV

I DIDN'T get much chance of a holiday that summer, as almost immediately we took up final rehearsing for the important production of the autumn—"Antony and Cleopatra."

Tree had made the most elaborate and wonderful preparations. The stage was cut to pieces in order that the great barge might drift on for the first meeting of the Queen and Antony.

I was eating very little, and the strain was beginning to tell on me. I went to the river for week-ends, but that in itself is enervating, and my strength began to go.

The final rehearsals were terribly strenuous. For a whole week before the production we had dress rehearsals lasting until five and six in the morning. The company would sleep in boxes, or in groups on the floor behind the scenes, and be awakened for their cues; and the limelight men and scene hands would be dropping off to sleep at their posts. I had a favourite place, stretched out on the floor at the back of the dress circle. People trod on me in the dark, but I was too tired to mind, and went to sleep again.

Herbert Tree's vitality never wavered, and his voice, giving directions and supervising every smallest detail, could be heard unceasingly throughout the night. There never has been anyone with so much will-power or capacity for work.

He was like Napoleon or Edison, he didn't seem to need sleep at all.

It took me nearly an hour when the rehearsal was

finished to get home to Sheffield Terrace in my "growler." I would arrive with the milkman, to find Julian waiting up for me, and we would have breakfast and talk rehearsals over. He was playing Pompey, and finished in the early part of the play, and he would go home with the best intentions in the world to keep the fire in and the food hot; but, as hour after hour went by, he would fall asleep, and the ashes in the grate would be grey when I got home in the dawn.

On the final night before the production I got back at eight in the morning. I had to be at the theatre again for a run-through at two o'clock, then get a rest at a friend's house—tired and excited and anxious—and be at the theatre again at seven in order to put on my brown make-up and be ready for the first night.

I was in an agony of nervousness. It was a tremendous part for so young an actress, added to which I had a great sense of the responsibility of being the head of the production.

I felt I owed so much to Herbert Tree for entrusting me with that rôle, and my anxiety to do my best was a handicap in itself.

I was too conscientious in those days.

The strain was beginning to tell on me; my voice was hoarse and my physical strength was going. For Cleopatra one needed a super-voice.

There were crowds of people marching about, and bugles and cries to be overtopped, and I had thrown my chief weapon away for the sake of a ridiculous ambition to be thinner. Sir Herbert had begged me not to do it, but I insisted and thought I knew better.

How foolish to go against Nature! I had wrecked my superb strength with the absurd diet I was on. A few pounds of weight one way or the other doesn't matter if you can give strength and power to your performance. I am sure this mania for being thin is the reason for the lack of vitality in lots of the younger actresses of to-day.

It was the first time that nervousness overcame me in

the theatre. I generally act the better for it, and am a good "first-nighter." It gives me added excitement and vitality, like a race-horse waiting for the start; but that night, because of my depleted strength, it was a wet blanket that descended on me. My limbs felt heavy and my voice thin. I wasn't at my best.

"Antony and Cleopatra," as a matter of fact, is an extremely curious play. It is a love story, but the lovers hardly meet, and when they do they quarrel incessantly. I played the scene with the messenger very well indeed, but after that my power had gone and I couldn't rise to anything. I was so conscious of my voice and of the audience.

The next morning the criticisms were divided about my performance, though some of them—Mr. Walkley of "The Times" and many of the more serious critics—gave me wonderful praise. But I knew so well, as every artist knows, that I hadn't hit the bull's-eye. If you don't succeed on a first night, however much your performance may improve, the opportunity is lost, and never returns.

The instinctive feeling of the audience comes over, and even their applause cannot deceive. It is like the arena. One's fate is decided, thumbs-up, thumbs-down!

All the praise and well-meant insincerity and adulation of the people who visit one after a performance never deceive an artist. Only too well we know our successes and limitations. It is as if a little inner voice spoke and condemned or praised, and nothing else matters.

If one is not satisfied oneself nothing else suffices.

The great success of the evening was Lyn Harding's splendid rendering of the speech of Enobarbus; and my husband had great praise too for his acting in the small part of Pompey. Their appearance was magnificent and they looked Romans.

It was amazing how beautifully the piece was put on, and the inventive genius of Herbert Tree's mind.

There is only a mention in the play of Cleopatra appearing as the goddess Isis, but Tree elaborated this into a



great tableau. It was the most spectacular scene in the whole play, where Cleopatra, robed in silver, crowned in silver, carrying a golden sceptre and the symbol of the sacred golden calf in her hand, went in procession through the streets of Alexandria, the ragged, screaming populace acclaiming the Queen, half in hate, half in superstitious fear and joy, as she made her sacrilegious ascent to her high throne in the market-place.

I looked very beautiful in this scene, the contrast of the silver and my dusky brown skin making a wonderful picture.

I had a serious argument with Sir Herbert at the dress rehearsal, almost amounting to a quarrel. It was absurd as I look back at it, and it has made me laugh many times since, but when it happened I took it very seriously. He loved historical facts and had discovered that Cleopatra had five children. This appealed to his whimsical, fantastic mind. What was my horror to find myself in the procession, looking most lovely, followed by this brood! What could an actress do? The splendid, passionate Queen was ridiculous with a large family. The domestic point of view of Cleopatra seemed utterly incongruous. I simply couldn't bear it. I implored him to take them away, but he insisted on all five at the dress rehearsal. How could one be romantic under those circumstances? It was no use making that glorious entrance to be followed by those children, getting smaller and smaller, like steps, until the last one was quite tiny.

I was broken-hearted, and wept so bitterly, stamping my foot and making a ridiculous scene and saying I would not play, that at last he gave way to pacify me, and we compromised on three.

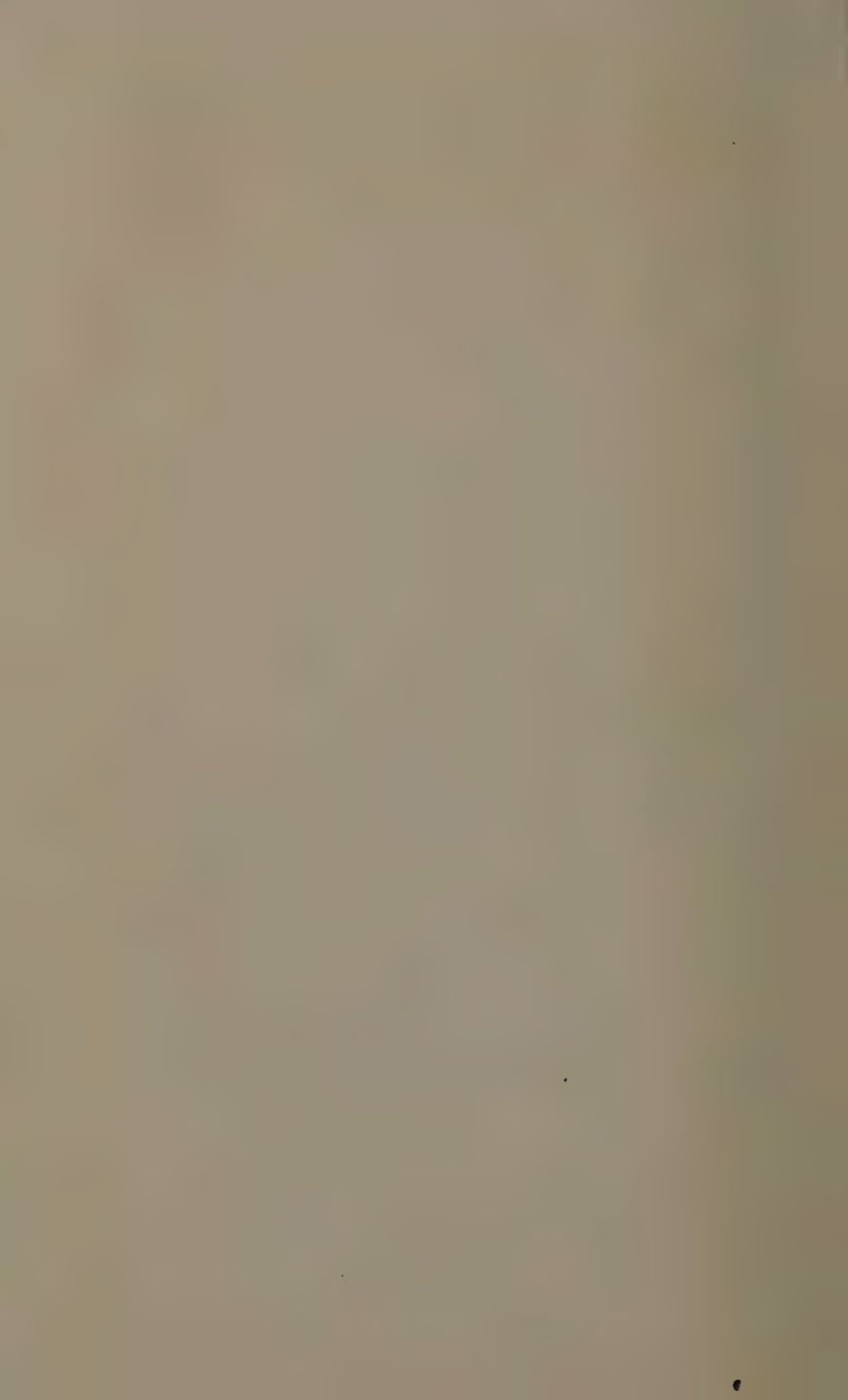
I prepared for my entrance on the first night with three following behind.

I tried to look as if they did not belong to me, and prayed in my soul that the audience would think they were attendants. I treated them with great scorn. I mounted my throne and looked round, and the two





AS 'CLEOPATRA'



smallest, gorgeously robed in silver, looking like miniatures of me, were coming hand in hand, bewilderment on their little faces.

He had given them a star entrance and made it worse than ever. If ever there was murder in my heart it was at that moment; I could have willingly strangled my entire family.

Those children were always a bone of contention between us, and spoilt my enjoyment of the part, but it was Sir Herbert's everlasting joke. He teased me throughout the run of the play.

I would mount the steps with the greatest dignity to find a doll sitting on my throne with "Ptolemy Junior" pinned on its chest. He would put them in my room, or on my dressing-table, or there would be dolls, dressed up, in some quiet corner of the stage, leaning sideways, looking ridiculous. And one night, in one of the very serious scenes, he slipped a little naked doll into my hand. But it was a good lesson in discipline! It taught me not to lose my temper and give myself airs, or try to interfere with any business he chose to put into a play, and in the future I took care to mind my own business.

While I was playing at His Majesty's one of the greatest artists the English theatre has ever known was at the head of the musical-comedy stage, and we became great friends.

How can one describe this entrancing personality? She was very young and very pretty, with a figure like a reed and a face like an enchanting marmoset.

She danced like a breeze and had a tiny little charming breathless voice, full of subtle nuance. Her words were half spoken, half sung, and when she first came on the stage, in contrast to the noise and dash and go of her environment, you were convinced that you wouldn't be able to hear a word, but the minute they saw her the audience settled down and listened, not only with their ears but with their hearts, to Gertie Millar singing.

She was very shy and, in consequence, the audience took her under their wing.

I think this particular method of appeal is the greatest asset an artist can possess.

Besides, she had very fine dramatic gifts and great artistry. I always think the character of an actor shows so amazingly in the quality of their work. It is as if they reflected their spirit through a pane of glass.

Gertie Millar's simplicity and charm on the stage were the direct outcome of her generosity and kindness in life, and her uncomplicated point of view. Even in those days she had a colony of retainers, poor people in the theatre—dressers, scene hands, and comrades who had fallen by the way. And in the years that have gone by the colony of retainers has grown until it is almost a village.

Her pensioners live in shining little cottages, spotlessly clean and neat, happy and peaceful in their knowledge of her protection for the rest of their lives. We have been devoted friends for years.

## CHAPTER XXV

**D**URING the run of "Antony and Cleopatra" we received a command from the German Emperor to go to Berlin and act for ten days at the State Theatre. It was a very great honour, but a very expensive one for Herbert Tree, as it meant taking the entire company.

The special command was "Antony and Cleopatra," but we were to play a repertory, "Hamlet," "Trilby," and "The Merry Wives of Windsor," winding up with the gala night.

We crossed to Holland in the following month of April. The boat was very small and the sea was very rough. It is the only time that I have been frightened at sea, although I have had some bad crossings on the Atlantic. It was a terrifying night, and how glad I was to land!

It was my first sight of dear little neat Holland. It looked so peaceful as we passed through in the train! Like a child's Noah's Ark. Then we arrived in gorgeous Berlin.

It was my first glimpse of Germany, and under such thrilling auspices.

It was wonderful. We were entertained by everybody. The theatres and concerts and operas were free to us, and Reinhardt and Ludwig Barnay entertained us. Herr Barnay was an old man, but the name of his company was a tradition in Berlin, and he had some official position in the State Theatre.

There were splendid banquets lasting for hours, where people ate enormous quantities of food and drank great goblets of wine.

I would sit there, miserable and stupid, a German on either side of me, unable to speak a word of their language. I could only bow and smile, but they were very kind and tolerant to me. The food and wine went on and on indefinitely. I never felt so self-conscious or ignorant.

To understand languages is the only education really necessary.

But there is an international language which the Germans understand better than we do—the language of flowers. I would get mysterious bouquets with strange combinations of flowers, sometimes not very pretty, but somebody told me to look up their meaning in “The Language of Flowers.” There were quantities of little pink spidery blossoms. I didn’t think them very beautiful, but they seemed popular in Berlin.

They were called “Bleeding Hearts.”

The play we were opening with had a crowd of supernumeraries. It was impossible to bring a hundred people with us to Germany, so it was arranged that our English stage manager should go ahead and engage them in Berlin. He invented a kind of Esperanto which was magnificent in theory. Whenever a cue came he found the equivalent sound in the German language, so the crowd listening for these words came on.

This worked splendidly while he was training them, but when we came to take up rehearsals what was our dismay to find the same words occurring several times in the speeches, and the crowd dashed on regardless of the situation every time they heard their cue! The result was chaotic, and a German stage manager had to be called in at the last minute who understood both languages.

I had a wonderful press in Berlin. My performance of Cleopatra had improved out of all knowledge; but I was disappointed because Herbert Tree wouldn’t let me play Trilby. It would have been a wonderful contrast of parts, but his daughter Viola was cast for it, and gave a most charming performance.



But throughout our visit there was a curious air of antagonism towards us in the theatre, in spite of the kindness we received outside.

The scene hands didn't want to work for us. When we went to start the performance of "Hamlet" we found Yorick's skull smashed to pieces. We couldn't find our properties, and there were constant small, intangible difficulties to contend with.

The theatre was packed for every performance, and we had to give two extra matinées.

We had a very great success with the majority of the public, but the attitude of some of the students in front was distinctly unsympathetic. We couldn't understand it at the time, but in the light of later events it was very significant.

On the great gala night, with the Emperor and Empress in front, and all the officials, the scene hands struck and refused to move the scenery. We had to be very tender with the men, and they wouldn't be hurried. I don't think they were used to quick changes. There were ten scenes in "Antony and Cleopatra," and when we played it at His Majesty's, as the scene darkened, the staff would be waiting at the wings to rush on and silently make the change in the least possible time; they were trained as regularly as the company. But in Berlin, when the curtain came down, the staff would be trying to find places for their mugs of beer—consequently the waits were very long.

This irritated Herbert Tree excessively, and on the gala night he was extra nervous. He gave one of them a slight push to hurry him up, and the mug of beer crashed to the floor and was spilt. The rest of the staff regarded this as an international insult! Anyway, they walked out in a body.

We had got as far as the market-place in the play. The scenery was very solidly built, and Sir Herbert was frantic.

The members of the company trying to move large rostrums, and leaving them in more chaotic muddle than

before, would have been funny if it had not been so disastrous.

There was a terrible wait of an hour, and the Emperor was getting impatient.

He sent round to inquire the reason for the delay, and when he heard what it was a staff was rushed from one of the other theatres to our assistance; but they didn't understand the scenery, and the confusion was worse than ever. At last it was decided to continue the play in the market-place. It took away all illusion, and the death of Antony and the Queen's scene in the tower were played in that gigantic open space, and of course the performance suffered.

At the end the Emperor sent for us.

The noise and rioting in front were rather ominous, and not too friendly.

The audience wouldn't leave, and the students were breaking up some of the benches. The Emperor talked to us for a little, but his face was white and he looked very angry.

The noise could be heard in the ante-room behind the royal box, and was growing louder and louder.

The Emperor's face was tense as he said:

"I think my people would like to see you once again," then led Sir Herbert and me to the front of the royal box, and bowed from there as we stood on either side of him.

The change in the tone of the audience was remarkable. Gradually the riotous ones were subdued, and the noises resolved themselves into a great cheer; I suppose, in deference to their Emperor's express desire, which he showed so markedly.

Sir Herbert received a decoration, and the Emperor gave Viola and me bracelets of diamonds and sapphires. Then we returned to London. It was a memorable experience.

But, in spite of all the admiration I received in Berlin, and the love letters and flowers and compliments, I wasn't happy.

JULIAN  
L'ESTRANGE

CHARLES  
QUARTER-  
MAINE

BASIL  
GILL

FISHER  
LAN  
WHITE, HARDING

CECIL  
KING

CURTICE  
POUNDS

VIOLA TREE

SIR HERBERT TREE

CONSTANCE COLLIER

HENRY NEVILLE

AT BERLIN





I fell in love with an actor !

He didn't know it, and we never met. I have played with so many men, good-looking and charming, adored matinée idols who devastated the hearts of the young ladies who sat in front and envied me, but they never made my heart beat.

I suppose being introduced and within a quarter of an hour rushing into a total stranger's arms and playing a love scene kills romance ; it is merely business, and one takes it in the day's work.

There are far fewer love affairs between actors and actresses working together than the public have any idea of.

We regard each other as comrades. How I used to despise those love-lorn girls ! But ever since Berlin I've a secret sympathy with them.

For from the stalls I saw, for the first time, Alexander Moissi. I adored him. I was so shy and blushed so much that at Max Reinhardt's reception I refused to be introduced. He hadn't the faintest idea of this.

I met him twelve years later, and by that time my adoration had subsided into a delightful memory, and we became great friends.

He doesn't know to this day how much I loved him, and how I suffered.

Perhaps I fell in love with the "Hamlet" I have admired most.

Although I didn't understand German, I knew the play so well that the language was no handicap. I may have been affected by that glamorous time, but I think it was his voice.

And for me the voice holds all personality, all warmth, all humanity.

There are many voices full of character and charm and humour, but a beautiful speaking voice is so rare.

Sarah Bernhardt, Forbes-Robertson, Yvonne Printemps and the exquisite lyric voice of Moissi can never be forgotten.

## CHAPTER XXVI

ON my return from Berlin I was invited to Stratford-on-Avon to play in the Shakespeare Festival. I was delighted. It was the greatest inspiration to play at Stratford; everybody was there in the spirit of love, not criticism. We all gave our services, and the money that was made went to keep up the memorial, as the theatre was open only for the Festival and was closed for the rest of the year.

The audience knew the text down to the last word, and the only thing that could possibly have happened that would have been disastrous would have been to misquote a phrase.

I adored the Festival!

It was like a pilgrimage, as believers go to Lourdes and dip themselves in the sacred waters. One felt in touch with the very spirit of Shakespeare. I loved it so much that I wouldn't even let anybody pack for me. I wanted to do everything myself.

Some of the performances were a bit scrappy, but nobody minded. We would rehearse under the trees in the intervals of hockey and cricket matches and boating parties.

Dear Frank Benson, the head of it all, was very much beloved. It was the healthiest, happiest, youngest, jolliest company imaginable—the Benson company, and most of the stars of the English stage came out of it.

The Memorial Theatre was built on the banks of the Avon. It was very ugly and striped like a sugar-stick—but we all loved it so much that its ugliness was its charm.



You dressed for your part and, between acts, drifted about in a boat, listening to the nightingales and the rippling water, looking down the river toward Warwick—the same river that Shakespeare knew, and loved, and dreamed by as a boy.

Then, when your cue was called, you went in before a loving and kindly audience and spoke Shakespeare's beautiful words, with the knowledge that out there, under the moon, but a few hundred yards away, the poet was sleeping.

That was romance! The nightingales seemed to sing louder there than in any other place in the world. We thought they went to the Festival too, there were so many of them!

I played "Juliet" for the first time there, with Henry Ainley. He looked most wonderful as Romeo, and he has an exquisite voice; but I suppose during his career he has been given more credit for his character acting than in romantic parts.

Good looks are almost a handicap in the theatre. The critics seem to resent them and seldom give beautiful people credit for great acting ability. Perhaps they feel the gods have been too good, and it isn't fair.

Mother and I went down and stayed at the little inn with the names of all Shakespeare's plays, and the heroes and heroines, painted on the doors. She was in her native element.

How she adored it after those long years in the thirds! She looked a girl again; indeed, to the end of her life she never gave one the sense of being old. She could quote every play; her knowledge of Shakespeare was amazing. She was a little shocked that I didn't use a false deep voice and declaim my speeches, grandly enough, as was the tradition in her day, but, on the whole, she approved of my performance.

In the little village of Stratford-on-Avon before the war the greatest tribute of all was paid to Shakespeare.

One may talk of the *entente cordiale* of the World Peace

Conference ; but in Stratford-on-Avon, on Shakespeare's birthday, this poet brought together all the nations under his invisible banner of dreams.

Down the centre of the street that led to the river flag-posts were arranged. The ambassadors of the different countries met in the little public square, and each stood by a post on which his nation's flag hung half-mast. Grave and important men in all the splendour of their very best clothes—with the funny old-fashioned street as a background. Imagine all the nations of the world sending their embassies to do honour to a poet !

As the clock struck twelve each drew a cord, and the flags flew mast-high. Then, all together, those different great ones of the world, and the village people, and the guests of the town, went towards the birthplace of Shakespeare—the little house where he was born. They formed into a procession headed by the local band, which generally played out of tune (but even that was charming, as they had not allowed it to be overwhelmed with money), and each person was allowed to take a handful of flowers. They walked to the church, and a simple sermon was spoken, and afterwards the whole congregation filed past the grave.

As I said, no one was allowed more than a handful of flowers, so that the poorest villager and the richest in the land were on equal footing at the grave.

As they passed they flung their flowers, and when the world had gone by Shakespeare's monument was a white column of blossoms.

I went to Stratford many times after that, and saw a good deal of Marie Corelli, who lived in the village. She was very kind to me, and I often went to her charming house. I don't think she was very happy, as she wanted to have a good deal to do with the running of the Memorial Theatre, and a say in the general affairs of Stratford, but the Governors resented her sudden intrusion ; they had done very well for many years without her, and money had no weight there. One had to fall in with



AS 'JULIET'



the spirit of Stratford or stay away, and this Miss Corelli could not bring herself to do.

She had a gondola on the Avon, but the gondolier was Scotch, or he may have been Cornish; anyway, his accent clashed with his Italian costume, and the gondola looked ridiculous on the quiet old Avon. One had an embarrassed feeling of playing charades when she was kind enough to invite one into it.

I stayed at "The Hill" with the Archibald Flowers. Their devotion to Stratford and to the memory of Shakespeare has been their life work, and they were adorable friends to me in those days. Naturally, they resented Miss Corelli's high-handedness, but they never minded my visits to her, though I feared my friendship for them irritated Miss Corelli somewhat.

Moreover, she wasn't overburdened with tact. Tactlessness may be a noble quality—it is regarded by some as equivalent to honesty—but it makes life very uncomfortable nevertheless.

I remember an agonizing luncheon with Herbert Tree and Henry Ainley at Miss Corelli's house. Henry Ainley had just played "Hamlet," and they both regarded their performances with a good deal of satisfaction. There was a friendly resentment in their discussions of the part. The party was going very well when Miss Corelli produced a magnificent ring and announced that she intended to present it to the "Hamlet" she liked best. There was a slight though conscious smile on both faces. Then she put it away again, and the conversation from that moment flagged and the party broke up somewhat gloomily. She couldn't have meant to be so unkind; it must have been tactlessness.

She did a lot of good in Stratford, and the natives got to like her better as the years went by. She restored the Harvard House and presented it to the nation. But she never took root, and, according to her will, actors are not allowed to cross the threshold of her house.

So much has changed since the war, even the climate,

and April in Stratford is very cold now. Everything is on a much bigger scale—the little inn has grown into an hotel, and there are crowds of people.

We all knew each other in the streets in those days, and it was full of sunshine and warmth.

Herbert Tree got his idea for the Shakespeare Festival from Stratford, and he invited all the contemporary actors, beginning with Frank Benson, to take part in the Festival at His Majesty's. From this it grew and grew and became an institution in the theatre.



## CHAPTER XXVII

**T**HEN I went to Drury Lane and played in "The Sins of Society." I was working tremendously hard, doing concerts on Sundays, generally out of town and twice a day, so there wasn't much time for frivolity with ten performances a week. I did a second beautiful play at Drury Lane called "The Last of His Race." I played an Indian girl, and Basil Gill and Lyn Harding were tribesmen. We had never seen Indians, but we leapt about on the canvas rocks like gazelles, Mr. Gill, who was very shortsighted, occasionally missing his range and falling flat on his face. It was an extraordinarily beautiful and imaginative play, but the public didn't want it, and it only ran for three weeks, the shortest run I remember since my two disastrous beginnings in serious drama. Then I went back to His Majesty's for revivals of "Oliver Twist," "The Red Lamp," "A Man's Shadow," "The Merry Wives," and "Twelfth Night."

In spite of our changed positions and the success and adulation I received from the world, my mother and I were the same intimate friends. We were amused by the same absurd little things, played the same games with each other as when I used to take her hand and go shopping in the Lambeth Road with the shilling.

She was very small and I was very tall and, if she attempted to be cross, I would pick her up and put her on a chest of drawers and spoil her dignity, and she would have to laugh.

She was frightened of crossing the traffic, and would make several starts and then run back again to the curb.

I remember picking her up in Piccadilly Circus one day and carrying her to the island in the middle. How annoyed she was! Her face was scarlet when I put her down again, because the policeman and the flower-women round Eros' statue laughed!

I expect it comes of being an only child. I had none of the feeling that children are supposed to have for their parents, no respect, no fear, only intense love and friendliness. I never felt shy of her, and she seemed like my own generation—my elder sister. She wasn't clever in any way; she had the nature of a peasant, home-loving, gentle, fond of quiet pleasures.

I loved adventure and excitements. She had a wonderful way with me. I suppose some God-given instinct taught her how to control her violent child, for in my youth I was violent!

She never opposed anything I did, however spoilt or indiscreet. I don't know what would have become of me except for her subtle control. She was weaker than myself, but her weakness was her strength. She would say, "Do what you like, darling. I know it will be for the best and that you will never hurt me, because I need you so." She took the exact opposite line to my father, who loved me just as much but made me reckless. I was enchained by my mother's love and tenderness.

The fires of youth have died down in me and I can look back on those turbulent years with thankfulness to my mother, and gratitude that I was given such a friend and comrade to guide me.

It was absurd if people had known about my life in those days. The leading lady of His Majesty's—still with her pocket money! Mother gave me three pounds a week and took charge of the rest of my salary. I never learnt anything about the value of money, or domestic duties, or how to cook or run a house. I might have been the same little girl as in the touring days, and Julian was just as bad as Mother. I suppose no one was ever so looked after or petted and spoilt as I was in my home

life. Perhaps it is good to be spoilt ; it gives one a sense of importance which one unconsciously conveys to the world. I was so important to my family that I subconsciously demanded the same treatment from outsiders. Had I been a consciously selfish person I should have been unbearable ; as it was I took it for granted, from the attitude of my mother and Julian, that I should have the best place in life.

When they left me and I had to find my own level—my true value—the shock, at first, was bewildering ; for in those days, however cruel the world was, I could rush back into their hearts and be queen of all. Their supreme belief in me and in everything I did, whether I was right or wrong, was a constant solace.

Youth is like a mountain torrent, rushing down the rocks until it finds the broad stream of life leading to that infinite ocean—which is oblivion.

It is a cruel kindness to love one's children too much. Nothing in life can take the place of a mother's adoration. No loves, no passions, no excitements, no successes have that same warmth ; and I miss, to this day, that tender understanding of my childishness !

I hate having to be grown-up, although I am a middle-aged woman.

I can tell by a quality of hardness, a certain defiance—even in the most successful people—the unloved child. They have no warmth, no background ; only success and cynicism and disbelief in life.

Loved children are for ever children.

But one finds mother-love again in all true love. For love—that little maligned word that is used as glibly as genius—is utter selflessness, self-sacrifice, unpossessive, and ever giving !

It is quite unlike the counterfeit emotions that usurp its name.

My married life wasn't going very well, through no fault of ours. We were devoted to each other, but Julian

was very proud, and it is a humiliating thing for a man of no position to be married to a distinguished woman. Little things came between us, and the little things of life are so infinitely more important than the big ones, I suppose, because there are so many of them.

Julian used to laugh and say, "As long as they don't call me Mr. Collier I don't mind," but I knew it hurt him terribly. There would be invitations for me alone, and I would be the guest of honour at some function and Julian would be left out. At parties some prominent man or woman would pick me out. How I used to long for Julian to be included in the conversation! He would get plenty of admiration from the women for his charm and beauty, but there was a feeling of condescension for him as the handsome husband of Constance Collier from the people who admired me most. Although we hardly spoke of these things, the rift was widening.

I would be almost rude and snubbing to those who gave me special attention in my efforts to make our position equal.

I have always valued my home life more than the mask of success I have built up for myself, the camouflage that every artist unconsciously assembles on his way through life.

Perhaps because I am more Latin than anything else in feeling, and my mother's blood is strongest in me, I have always thought it more important to be happy than successful. So many brilliant people have said to me: "Happiness is not essential"; but I think it is the most essential thing in life.

I knew that if something drastic didn't happen my marriage would eventually prove a failure.

Julian had great talent, but my overshadowing success prevented him being appreciated sufficiently in England. He was chafing to get ahead and succeed, for my sake as much as for his own. The thought was growing in my mind that it was one thing or the other—we should either have to start afresh in some new land or we should be on the rocks.

There was America !

I was unknown there and we could start together again.

Julian had an engagement offered him by Maxine Elliot. We could not bear the thought of parting, but I urged him to go. It meant losing one or other of my dear ones ; if I went with him I should have to leave Mother behind, as she couldn't leave my father in England. I should have to give up my position in London and break entirely new ground. I was terribly worried. Julian wouldn't accept the engagement, as he couldn't bear to leave me behind.

One day, on the spur of the moment, I rang up Mr. Frohman at the Savoy. I wanted to talk my troubles over with him. He was alone, and I went to lunch with him. He was interested in everything that happened to me, in an abstract way, as if he were listening to the plot of a play. In the end he said :

"Make up your mind now ; come to America."

I asked for time to think it over, but he told me my only chance was to decide on the spot. We went up to his room, and he rang through to William Gillette, who was staying in the hotel.

Mr. Gillette happened to be in, and came along, and when he entered Mr. Frohman said :

"Here is your leading lady."

Then and there it was decided, and I accepted an engagement to go and play in New York with Mr. Gillette in Henri Bernstein's play "Samson."

I knew dear Charles Frohman made that position for me, to help me. He had no more idea of taking me to America than I had of going when we started lunch.

I went home in a daze and told Julian. He pretended to think that my decision was a mad one, but I knew he was secretly tremendously happy.

Mr. Tree was very angry ; and my other friends thought the step disastrous for my career, but I had burnt my boats and, although I had many hours of regrets and waverings, I had a secret elation and a sense of renewal



at the thought of new conquests, and I stuck to my decision.

Julian sailed before me. The thought that I was uprooting and leaving England didn't seem real to me until three weeks before my departure. Then I realized what I had done. I couldn't imagine living anywhere but in London ; I knew every nook and cranny of it.

Except for the tours and one or two trips to Paris and the great event of Berlin, I had never travelled, and, certainly, I had never known a world without my mother. The thought of parting with her was terrible, but from the time she knew it was inevitable her courage never failed her.

She talked incessantly of my new successes in the future, and how broadening and stimulating it was to see the world. Although I knew her heart was breaking, she was always laughing.

Youth is so arrogant. I tried to deceive myself. I even pretended to be a little hurt that she took it so lightly. I begged her to come with me, but her sense of duty was always foremost. Right and wrong were so clearly defined in her mind that she never compromised with them, however much she suffered. Her place was with my father, just as mine was with Julian, she told me ; and so she gave me up.

I suppose it is a terrible thing to say, but I thank God I never had children.

The sufferings of parents when they get old and more or less unwanted and have to take a second place must be terrible, and there always comes a time when that happens. We batten and grow on the sufferings of those we love best, it seems to me, and the braver and nobler they are the more we accept their sacrifices.

After all she had done for me, all her struggles and her shieldings of me from life, I left her behind to a dreary loneliness just when she needed me most.

But I soon forgot in the excitement of the new adventure.



## CHAPTER XXVIII

I SAILED on the "Mauretania." I shall never forget the thrilling feeling of crossing the Atlantic for the first time, standing on the great ship watching the cliffs of England recede, miles of ocean around me, going to an unknown country without friends. It was entrancing.

We went through great storms, the waves came as high as the top deck. We even had a panic, when one of the propellers broke and the ship stood still for a while in the raging sea. People ran about in their night-dresses, and everybody thought we were going down, but I was so used to theatre that it was like a scene out of a Drury Lane melodrama. Nothing seemed real to me.

Ah, how mad it was to throw away the position I had built up for myself, to break off at the zenith of my career and start all over again from the beginning!

We don't realize these things until the years have gone by and we look back over the strange pattern of our lives—the Harlequinade!

I didn't like the Statue of Liberty much when I saw her first. She was disappointing to me; she looked fat and ungraceful with her head down and her arm upholding the torch. I always long for her head to be thrown back, following the line of her arm. But we passed her by.

It was a misty morning when the great ship sailed into New York harbour.

The storms were past and the channel was calm. I had stayed up all night to get my first glimpse!

I shall never forget the touching beauty of it.

The silhouette of those tall sky-scrapers in the grey haze, with the sun breaking through; the whole thing indefinite and cloudy. Peaks and spires melting into the sky, their outline merged into the heavens—so welcoming, so gallant—as they stand there at the water's edge.

There is courage in their height and beauty, a sense of hope and youth about them, as if they are beckoning the traveller to new adventure.

I thought of the poor emigrants in the steerage, sailing through strange waters, leaving their countries behind them, going to an unknown destination, an alien people and an alien language, then the first glimpses of that magic city in the distance—their El Dorado.

I have crossed the Atlantic many times since, but I have always had that same sense of splendour when I first see the harbour. To me it is the most beautiful harbour in the world. Since then I have come to haven in many ports, some of them beautiful, colourful, intimate and friendly—russet Naples, the golden gate of San Francisco, Honolulu, Lisbon—but there is a grandness about New York harbour that is unforgettable.

But these fairy-like buildings are filled to the brim with seething workers: tier after tier of girls typing away from morning until night at record-breaking speed—fortunes are made and lost in the space of ten minutes—express elevators rushing up and down perpetually; thousands of men and women swarming in and out of the swing doors, looking like black ants. The energy and pace and vitality of it is terrifying. To be in the race you must run like the proverbial hare. No place for slackers in New York City, time and the future are too valuable. It is a strange contrast leaving behind the ghost-haunted countries of the past and arriving in the land of the future. No ghosts, no traditions; the land of what you are going to be, not what you are.

I must say I was one of the most bewildered when I arrived. I drove straight to a little hotel called the

"Algonquin." It was very small and very few English people knew of it. There was a tiny little dining-room with pictures of the Bay of Naples round it, and it was quiet and inconspicuous but very friendly.

Mr. Frank Case was managing it, and I made it my home during my first stay in America.

I shall never forget my first party. I had been used to the "Dome," to the, almost, formal position of the leading ladies in the theatres in London. Irene Vanbrugh of the St. James's; and the deference shown by the socially elect to Mrs. Patrick Campbell when she deigned to bestow her brilliant presence on them; the magnificence of Lady Alexander; the wit of Lady Tree, and the reverent attitude of everybody to Mrs. Kendal's Victorian luncheon parties, which she periodically gave to the members of the profession. Those luncheons were awe-inspiring! One had a sense of having attended some great ceremony, and a frightful disappointment if one didn't receive an invitation.

But there was none of this in New York.

They gave a big supper party to welcome me. All the celebrities were invited to greet me. When I made my shy entrance as the guest of honour—to my amazement—the handsomest and most popular leading man of the day kissed me full on the mouth, put his arm around my waist and bade me welcome. They were all very gay and debonair; none of the slight stand-offishness of British celebrities about them. It was a very jolly party, but I was dumb with bewilderment most of the evening. There were merry speeches and lots of kisses and embraces. From their attitude towards each other you hadn't the least idea whether it was a lifelong love affair or light-hearted friendliness, or because of the hot night and the moon. I know it ended with "Follow my leader" over the tables.

They were all of the acting and writing profession, earning enormous salaries and idolized by the public; none of the mix-up of Society and theatre we had in

England, no inadequate actresses assuming the airs and graces of duchesses.

They were strong in their belief in the theatre and their pride in it. They talked shop because it interested them most, and because they were of the theatre and for the theatre, and it was their life's ambition to succeed in the theatre. Consequently they conveyed across the footlights a more vital acting force than I had left behind me among the rank and file of the English stage. Perhaps, because they were purely actors and nothing else they seemed to have a quicker contact with the heart of the public.

Anyway, they were adorable to me. Why they should have been I don't know. I was lonely and nervous, and whenever I am shy I put on a rather disagreeable air, as of a slightly offended Roman empress. Then, too, I was self-conscious about my clothes, and that always upsets me. I thought I had bought a suitable wardrobe in London, but it didn't suit New York. It was the autumn, and "Indian summer" had come back for a day or two as it only can in America, and I felt hot and dowdy. But they ignored my defects and accepted me in all friendliness, as if I had been adopted into a large family.

This looks a little as if the party they gave to welcome me was rowdy and that they drank unduly. This is far from the case—I only mention it to convey an idea of the different characteristics of the nations.

In London, everybody is so grown-up and sophisticated; but in America they were like a lot of happy-hearted children, playing childish games and having fun.

At some party at that time I met one of my dearest friends in life—Avery Hopwood, the gentlest, most charming creature imaginable, and a tremendously successful playwright, sought after by everybody. He was a strange dual personality: one side of his nature so gay, the other *macabre*. It was as if he were two entities.

It always seems strange to me that Fate doesn't give

a sign or an indication of the people who are going to mean a great deal to one in life.

There should be a flash of lightning, or a clap of thunder, or an inner voice that says "This is a friend."

Meetings in real life are so undramatic. I remember, one night at a party that Mrs. Benjamin Guinness gave for me in her Washington Square house after my performance of John Masefield's "Nan," I met a dark-haired young man, very good-looking and with charming manners. I talked to him for a moment casually, and turned to speak to somebody else. Some instinct should have told me that, years afterwards, we should be comrades and work and struggle in the theatre, and eventually achieve success; that we should write plays together, and produce them in spite of all opposition. But at that first meeting we did not impress each other much, or meet again until years after, when the war was over.

So I met Ivor Novello!

Where did I meet Clara Butt? She doesn't remember, neither do I, and yet we have always been the greatest friends. We often say to each other, "It must have been at such and such a place." Then some incident comes back to us, and we say, "No, but I knew you then." It seems so stupid, and yet I can remember the very moment and form of a room in which I have met the merest acquaintances.

I have tried so hard to think back into the past, to pierce the years that have gone, to try and remember my first meeting with the person who has influenced my life most of all, I think, except my mother, my best friend—Edward Sheldon.

I am not alone in this. He is the best friend of any of us who have the privilege of knowing him.

Strange I cannot remember where we met; but he always seems to have been there, in my years in America—reasonable, just and kind, with the supreme simplicity of genius and the limitless wisdom of ages. He was a very young man then.



I suppose those who are marked out for special suffering in the world are given special gifts, and if the soul is great enough there is nothing it cannot overcome.

Edward Sheldon, in those days, was a rosy-cheeked, black-haired boy, simple and quiet, taking his great triumphs with shy gratitude, always thinking of other people before himself.

When he wrote his first play, "Salvation Nell," and sent it to Alice Kauser, who has befriended so many young authors, she wrote back asking Edward Sheldon to come and see her. He waited in the sitting-room, and when she came in she looked astonished and said, "But I sent for your father." He had to acknowledge, in his embarrassed, shy way, that he had written that splendid play himself.

I have always gone to Ned Sheldon with my troubles and difficulties, and he has solved them for me. He has been responsible for the best work I have done. He has kept up my ideals and belief in the theatre, and has given me the wisest counsel and help. Yet I cannot for the life of me remember where we met!

Even in those days, young as he was, he gave one a sense of peace that was quite remarkable. He had found himself, and to be with him was like sitting by a deep, still lake in the twilight, amid the misty, soft shadows of the overhanging trees.

You came away refreshed and invigorated.

And now the quiet room where he lies day after day, with the world rushing on around him, is a haven of peace to those whom he loves.



## CHAPTER XXIX

**A**MERICAN hospitality is notorious. They waste no time in breaking ground. One night, at a party sponsored by dear Kyrle Bellew, who had taken the greatest interest in my career since I had been a member, in a very small way, of his company, in conjunction with Mrs. Brown-Potter, when they had played in London, I sat by a little man with a large head and masses of springy, upright, curly hair, and very serious, grey eyes. He had a very tall wife, who sat opposite, and they took special care of me. I think they sensed my strangeness and my gusts of home-sickness.

They were Mr. and Mrs. James Forbes. He had been responsible, already, for some of the best comedies on the American stage.

They invited me to their home in Westchester for the week-end, to get some rest before I started rehearsals. They assured me it would be quiet and peaceful.

They had a shack built on a hill, amongst high trees, with not a neighbour in sight! It wasn't very large, but it was full of comfort and homeliness but awe-inspiring in its solitude. I began to get nervous when we drove through the trees in the twilight, with the shadows lengthening and strange forest sounds coming from the woods around us.

When we arrived we found that one of the windows had been broken in the night, and a large rock that had done the damage was lying on the floor among the splintered glass. The woman in charge had left it there as a sort of Exhibit A. She told us that for the past two nights

there had been shots round the house in the darkness, the two men who worked on the place were out searching the woods, and that she was the only person there. She had a gun in her hand as she spoke.

Mr. Forbes, looking over an accumulation of mail, explained casually that some Italians who had been working on a new house he was building across the hill had been discharged and were acting a bit "ugly."

His wife seemed concerned only with the damage done.

I pretended I didn't mind. I tried to keep up the reputation of English courage in spite of my blanching face and trembling knees. Mr. Forbes assured me that it was "nothing."

Just then the door opened, and in filed three enormous men armed with rifles and shot-guns. They looked like desperadoes, but were really kindly neighbouring farmers who had been patrolling the place in the absence of the family. How thankful I was to see them! In accordance with the fixed social laws of rural communities in America, they were presented to me. They shifted their guns and shook hands, and "were pleased to meet" me. And I was "very pleased to meet" them. I was feeling a distinct sense of protection when, to my horror, after an exchange of jokes about the "wops," they said "Good night" and left.

Mr. Forbes told us that everything would be all right, and that they often had trouble of that sort, so I pulled myself together and we sat down to dinner.

There was one big sitting-room, which ran the whole length of the shack, with windows on either side, and the table between, so that if any prowler had seen us he could have picked us off without the slightest difficulty. Mr. Forbes refused to have the blinds down or the windows screened, and sat opposite me with a shot-gun leaning against the table. He said he didn't want to be taken unawares! All the time they—he and his wife—kept up a running conversation about plays and theatres as if nothing was happening at all.

It was fantastic, but I was thankful for their animation, as I could hardly speak with fright.

Every time there was a crunching of leaves or the wind blew through the branches Jimmy flew to the window and, levelling his gun, told Jean, his wife, and me to stand well back against the wall. No hero of a moving picture was ever so brave.

I am the biggest physical coward in the world ; also I have a very vivid imagination. I thought I saw lions and tigers lurking in the darkening woods, their glittering eyes upon us, ready to pounce—or was it the shining muzzle of a gun ?

When bedtime came they took me to my room and told me I wasn't to be disturbed if I heard shots in the night. They seemed to regard this as merely an annoyance and weren't at all alarmed ; but it was all new to me, and I longed for a quiet week-end on the Thames with nothing more formidable than an occasional mosquito.

I didn't sleep a wink all night, and I thought I heard stealthy footsteps prowling round the house, and in fitful dreams I saw Indians and dagos leading us out, one by one, to be shot !

But the morning came, and I was extremely thankful to get back to my comfortable hotel in New York.

We have laughed over my restful week-end many times since, but certainly it was the beginning of a very deep and sincere friendship that has never wavered.

It was a little frightening to start rehearsals with an entirely new company. Most of us at His Majesty's had played together for years, so we knew each other's methods. But on the first morning of rehearsals at the Criterion Theatre, in New York, a very beautiful woman came up to me and held out a friendly hand and put me at my ease—it was Pauline Frederick ; and Arthur Byron was making me laugh before I had known him half an hour—as he has made me laugh ever since.

“The best-laid schemes o’ mice and men  
Gang aft a-gley,”

the poet has said, and certainly Julian’s plan and mine to start afresh together went very much “a-gley.” We hadn’t reckoned on the distances and vastness of the continent of America. We had planned a little flat in New York where we could at least spend the week-ends together, but, after a few days, my husband’s tour opened in Cleveland or somewhere near it—two days’ journey! It was terribly tiring to take a train after the play to meet half-way in some little town, and part again Sunday night for a long sleeper journey to our different destinations. It grew impossible as Julian receded farther and farther into the West, so we didn’t see each other for several months.

My part in “Samson” wasn’t very suitable to me. It was the last rôle I should have been chosen for in London: a depressing and rather colourless heroine who got herself into innumerable muddles and had to be extricated by the rest of the cast—a most irritating lady.

I had to suppress my forceful personality and be weak and drifting. But dear C. F. had cast me for it out of kindness, and, although I wasn’t very good, he obstinately persisted in his belief in me.

Pauline Frederick as the “heavy” lady made the success.

So my first encounter with the New York Press wasn’t entirely satisfactory. It was hard to bear, as I had been very spoilt in London.

Moreover, I had never come across the form of criticism, which, in those days, was entirely personal and rather brutal. In England, if an artist won his or her spurs, the critics, although disapproving of their point of view and disagreeing with their conception, accepted them on a footing of equality. The London critics had a certain regard for the mentality of an actor; not so the American Press of those days.

They seemed to have a preconceived idea that actors

and actresses had no brains of any sort at all, and had never given a moment's thought to the rôle they were portraying. They treated them as skittles, to be knocked down at their own sweet will, and a production which had taken a manager months of preparation and thought and strain and money was, to them, no more than a glorified coco-nut shy. Their great object was to make the public laugh "at," not "with" the players.

Of course there were many exceptions; Mr. Winter, for instance, and Mr. Parker, of Boston, who, by their sympathetic understanding and love of the theatre, helped and inspired an artist and spurred him on to better endeavour.

But, thank Heaven, the "sniper" form of criticism is a thing of the past in New York!

But to go back to "Samson."

Oh, that first night! My first appearance before the American public.

My room at the Criterion was filled with flowers. Everybody in New York, it seems, had sent them to me, whether they knew me or not. There was hardly space for them—great stacks of American Beauty roses and orchids and violets, flowers in and out of season, so expensive, so full of kindly welcome; their beautiful, overpowering scent is in my nostrils still as I think back. And yet my utter loneliness as I sat amongst them when the curtain had descended and I realized fully what I had given up!

In spite of all the kindness and generosity that I received, how I longed for His Majesty's and the Dome and, most of all, for *her*!

It was the first "first night" without her I had ever known.

Then back to a strange hotel—a night of bitter, bitter tears. Growing pains of the soul indeed!

As the months went by I got to understand and love New York. America owes a great deal to its climate. In spite of the teeming masses of human beings, the



push and hustle and strife, there is always that glorious sun and a glint of blue sky behind the silhouette of the tall buildings to soften and beautify everything. How godlike the sun is ! I suppose, if there wasn't that smiling American sky, the struggle would be unbearable. But the sun bedizens all and brings, in its warm rays, laughter and good humour.

I wonder if they would be the same light-hearted people if they had to contend with our fogs and drenching rains ? There is an exhilaration in the frosty mornings in New York, the snow piled several feet high beside the pavement and everything looking like a glorified Christmas card, glinting and sparkling in the fresh morning air. It is even fun to plough along in great boots, breasting the snow-storm, with the soft white flakes clinging to you until you look like a snow-man, or to fight with the winds round the corners as they rollick and toss your skirts over your head.

The elements there even seem young.

No brown slush and steady rain and fogs the colour of pea soup that depress you for weeks. However fierce the storm is, hey presto ! in an hour or two it is changed and the cheerful sun is out again.

Then there is Fifth Avenue, the most valuable street in the world, I suppose ; the windows full of the treasures of the earth. From the East, the South, the West and the North the ships bring their cargoes. Jades from China, marbles from Greece, superb furs from Russia, diamonds and rubies and emeralds from India and Africa. Each window, as you pass, is a veritable treasure trove.

I suppose there is more wealth in the shops in Fifth Avenue and around that district than in any market in the world, even the Rue de la Paix.

It is a strange thing in New York, the avenues are not very far apart, but the people who frequent them have a totally different character, and they never blend. Actors in Broadway are quite different to the working classes in Sixth Avenue.



The beautifully-dressed Fifth Avenue folk never stray out of their parade. Then comes Park Avenue, not more than two or three blocks away, where the millionaires live, with its magnificent sombre residences and scarcely a soul on the pavements.

Then, beyond, Madison Avenue, traffic-blocked, full of tramcars and commerce.

Each avenue in New York might belong to a different nation.

## CHAPTER XXX

**W**HEN the spring came and it began to get hot, I sailed home again to take part in the Festival at His Majesty's.

My husband was still touring, far away.

I had seen a lot of the William Favershams in America, and they invited my mother and me to visit them at their manor house in Surrey. I had known Mrs. Faversham in London in the years when we were all beginning our careers, and she was playing tiny little parts at the St. James's. A beautiful tall girl with a du Maurier face, full of ambition and determination to succeed.

Even in the earliest days of all we had a sense that Julie Opp would "get on." She had more character than any of us.

She later married Robert Loraine, but, wisely, they had parted, as they didn't agree. Afterwards she became Mrs. William Faversham, the wife of one of the most famous of American stars, and had developed into a beautiful and generous woman.

The Favershams were wonderful hosts, and they had an ideal way of living. They worked very hard during nine months of the year in America.

No one knows what hard work means if they haven't done a tour of "one-night stands"! A different town every night, sometimes arriving just in time for the performance, and boarding the train again after the play, travelling all night, soothed by the rocking of the train and the clanging of the station bells, to awaken in the morning covered in coal dust.

The Favershams made a great deal of money and then came home for three months of absolute holiday.

Their great joy was to entertain their friends. They had a lovely old house facing a village green, with the ducks and goats and cows wandering about and a genuine village blacksmith pounding on his anvil all day long. There was an exquisite little village church with a rustic gate. On Sunday evenings, during the service, as the sun was setting, you could hear the high childish voices of the village choir floating on the twilight air.

It was the most beautiful and ideal bit of English life—a terrific contrast to the strain of American touring.

They bought the house from Richard Le Gallienne. It was rambling and oak-beamed, with a lovely broken red roof.

One imagined that the people of the generation who built it were much smaller than we were, for the doors were so low that, until you got used to them, you spent your life in a constant state of slight concussion of the brain.

When the Faversham holiday started they dropped all thought of theatre and lived an absolute country life. We used to call Willie Faversham "The Squire." They entertained lavishly, generally about twelve people staying in the house, and relays of friends arriving for every meal or to spend the day. Sometimes the village green would look like the parking stand at a popular race meeting with the waiting cars.

We would have long tables and benches in the sunny, old-fashioned garden with, perhaps, forty or fifty people for lunch.

Julie had a genius for friendship and organization, and she seemed to glory in taking trouble for the people she liked. And there we all were, her old friends, the ones that had been together in the beginning days, when we were shabby and poor, now all more or less successful; a little older, a little more personality about us, a little

more colour, and a good deal better dressed, but the same comrades. Anthony Hope and his beautiful young wife; her sister, Suzanne Sheldon, who married Henry Ainley at the village church, were consistent guests. But all the visiting Americans and the successful authors and novelists and interesting people of the day seemed to find their way to that sunny garden on Sundays.

Julie adored large parties, and was never so happy as when she was crowded out and everybody were enjoying themselves and she could hover over them like the Goddess of Plenty.

She had two very handsome sons, and Eva Le Gallienne, a little girl, was constantly there. She was almost their adopted daughter.

She was about twelve when I first met her; an amazing child, with all the indications of the greatness of her character even in those days.

She was the organizer of all the games and had absolute dominion over her childish coterie. The games she organized were significant and full of progress. They did not play as ordinary children play. There was a meaning in their amusement. It had a beginning and an end.

The boys adored and obeyed her. She was the most determined young person I ever knew.

She was a Girl Guide in those days. I have a vision of her now starting off for camp. They were to spend two weeks on the open plains, and Eva was to be the cook and general supervisor.

It was a cold spring morning, and I came down rather reluctantly from my cosy bed to see her off. She was mounted on an old white horse that took the milk round the village with one of Willy Faversham's Mexican saddles that he had used in "The Squaw Man," I think, strapped on. The poor old horse looked immensely surprised and a little uncomfortable at its equipment. The straps were too tight around his girth, and the saddle pinched him a good deal. But the brass nails and red leather gleamed

and sparkled in the morning sunlight. Eva had been polishing for days.

She was dressed as a Girl Guide, with her hair severely plaited in a straggly plait. A bright coloured blanket was slung in front of her and several parcels were fastened round her waist by a cord, and rested on the fat hocks of the old horse, much to his annoyance. They tickled him, for he kept swishing his tail backwards and forwards in mild protest.

There was a tremendous look of earnestness and determination in Eva's great grey eyes. Those eyes of hers, that are so wide and penetrating! They are the most characteristic thing about her; brilliant and star-like, they seem to shine out of the Nordic sky.

She flipped the old horse to start. They went down the lane in a very measured trot. I think she hoped the horse would gallop off like a Mexican steed. She looked like Don Quixote starting out on his adventures, and, as I leaned over the garden gate to watch her down the road, I could not help laughing and admiring the little upright, determined figure.

It rained hard that night and the wind blew round the house, and I thought of Eva out on the plains as I lay tucked comfortably in my warm bed. The storm rose higher, and I had a vague feeling of pity for the little adventurer as I dropped off cosily to sleep.

The next day a bedraggled but undaunted Eva arrived for equipment. It seems that in the night her tent had blown down and she had been pinned underneath it. She was only a child in the darkness and the cold, and most of us at that age would have been frightened. I was horrified when she told me about it, and asked her what she had done and if she had cried out for help. And her answer was so characteristic. She said, "No, of course not. I built it up again." And that, I think, is typically her attitude toward life.

She has created a unique place for herself in the theatre of America, built up on her childish dreams—a theatre

for the people. Every one condemned it as impractical, but it has proved to be one of the most practical and useful contributions to the theatre.

But she has an advantage over all of us. One is apt to forget she is the daughter of a great poet. And poets' dreams, if they were ever exploited, would perhaps be of greater value than the dreary imaginings of the materialists.

Then, when September came, back we sailed to New York for a hard-working season.

The next year I played the Duchess in "Israel," Henri Bernstein's fine play, another part totally unsuited to me.

I was the mother of a young prince, a Catholic who had worn herself out in devotion to the Cross; an ephemeral shadow, wasted by fasting and penance. And there was I, exuding vitality and strength, a person in the full tide of life. Nobody could have been more unsuitably cast than I.

But I was very excited about characterizing the part, and thought out all sorts of details of make-up. My son (off the stage) was several years older than myself, although he looked remarkably young and gave a magnificent performance. When the dress rehearsal came I took great care to line my face carefully and wear a wig, with a lace wrap over my white hair.

I made my entrance with a stoop, leaning on an ebony stick.

I thought my appearance splendid and that the management would be delighted, but when I came on there was a dead pause, and Mr. Frohman called me to the front of the stage and asked me why I was disguised in that manner.

I was terribly disappointed. I explained that I had worked out the make-up and the white wig to make myself look more like the age of the character. He ordered the whole rehearsal to stop while I went and took it all off. I pleaded that I looked too young. He



replied: "Of course, and no doubt the critics will blame you for that, but they'll know it's a fault you'll get over in the future, and the public prefer to see you as you are." I was broken-hearted, but had to do as I was told.

The play was a great success up to the second act. The enthusiasm was enormous, and we held the record for curtain calls—we took thirty-two! The audience went on and on, cheering and shouting.

Then came a dreadful last act.

On its way from France to America, in the translation, the play had changed out of all recognition, and one of the chief characters—a priest—had been turned into an *ingénue*. Somebody said, "As there was a frock in the piece, it might as well be a woman's as a man's"! So you can imagine how it threw this serious, deeply-conceived play out of gear.

The audience left the theatre in utter silence. The contrast was amazing after the success of that marvellous second act. But the play had a fair run. We acted it for a season in New York, and half the following season on tour.

Still, I had not got into my stride with the New York critics. I was too English. They did not quite understand my voice or my underplaying and persisted in regarding me as a foreigner. But dear C. F. obstinately believed in me. If he hadn't I don't suppose I should ever have succeeded in America.

After that came "Thaïs," an adaptation of Anatole France's book, with the music of the opera accompanying the play. I got on better in this, and my looks were of great value in the classic draperies.

Then came "Oliver Twist," with Nat Goodwin, Lyn Harding, and Marie Doro as Oliver. How exquisite she was! It was a triumph for all four of us, and at last the public and critics took me to their hearts.

Success in the theatre is a most curious thing. Some people achieve it overnight; others have to break down barriers. I think the latter way is best because, when

you get rooted in the heart of a new people, you stay there. It means they accept you permanently and are not merely dazzled by the flashing wings of the dragon-fly as it passes. I had to win my spurs with the American public, and now I am as much at home there as in England.

## CHAPTER XXXI

**N**OTHING very exciting happened to me for a year or two. I went on playing parts and going back each year to His Majesty's for the Festival.

When Sir Herbert was knighted I was playing in "The Merry Wives of Windsor" with dear Ellen Terry. We got news of it the night before. With her usual gaiety and sense of mischief, she arranged a little plot.

The final scene of "The Merry Wives" was one of the most beautiful, and certainly the best finale of any play I remember at His Majesty's. It opened on the lovely scene of Windsor Forest, with the fairies and village children dancing across the curtain at the end. The cheering would grow and grow as the audience got more and more enthusiastic.

On this particular night it was gayer than ever.

Sir John Falstaff was lying on the ground surrounded by the village children and the fairies, pinching and burning him. Ellen Terry and I, as the "wives," had to rescue him.

Instead of saying, "Arise, Sir John," we said in unison, "Arise, Sir Herbert."

We were the first to call him by his title.

The audience caught our meaning and cheered and applauded, and the merry scene was gayer than ever.

I stayed in England more or less in the next few years because my mother was not very well and, although she never said a word or tried to hinder me, I knew she longed to have me with her.

I think she felt our time together was getting short.

Although we had material comfort now, and I could

afford her little luxuries, I suppose Fate did not mean that we should have many years of peace and plenty together. It would have been too happy a lot for poor mortals on their pilgrimage through life, and so as our material comforts grew her health began to wane. Never her spirit !

I had not the faintest realization that our parting was to be so soon.

I had no more thought of her leaving me than of Westminster Abbey being swept away. I took her for granted ; I felt she would be there always, part of my life until the end.

My friends realized, however, that she was growing frailer. It seems amazing, with my quick brain, that I never noticed the signs and warnings.

She would tire quickly and not be so eager to go to the theatre with me. Still, she was always laughing and camouflaging and talking as if we were both at the beginning of life, with everything before us.

In the early part of 1914 we produced Maeterlinck's "Monna Vanna." I had always adored the play, but it was prohibited in England by the Lord Chamberlain.

About this time, with the aid of J. T. Grein, we were able to get the ban withdrawn, and we arranged to produce it for special matinées at the Queen's Theatre.

I had always loved this great and noble play. It was hard to understand why it had been censored. I was very happy and proud to play in it.

Her Gracious Majesty Queen Alexandra had shown me, in the past, very many small kindnesses, and I always regarded her as my own particular Royal lady, so, with infinite courage and the blindness of ignorance, I wrote her a personal letter explaining the situation and begging for her presence at our first performance.

I did not know at the time that it was quite a wrong procedure on my part, and I ought to have addressed the Lord Chamberlain and not the Queen. I wrote it in the fullness of my heart, as to a friend. I shot an arrow into the blue !

I thought, if so great a queen conferred her patronage on the play, it would silence every criticism and gain for Maeterlinck the honour he deserved.

I didn't dare to hope my request would be granted. Royal personages very seldom attend first performances. What, then, was my amazement to receive a gracious reply saying that Her Majesty would consent to be present. It was an act of magnificent condescension on her part and a splendid tribute to the great author. I need not say how proud we actors and actresses were that she conferred so great an honour on us.

We filled the theatre with her favourite pink roses, and not only did she come herself, but she brought her sister, the Empress of Russia.

The play was a triumphant success and received most dignified and serious criticism.

The matinées were so successful that we transferred the play to the evening bill at the Lyric Theatre at the end of June. Eva Le Gallienne made her first appearance, and played my little page in this play.

Then the shadow began to creep across the world.

It was strange to be playing in Maeterlinck's anti-war play at that time; stranger still that the first trouble began in Belgium! None of us had grasped the significance of the leading articles in the papers or the whispers of war. It all seemed grossly exaggerated, and so the night of the declaration came as a complete surprise to most people. We did not realize what it meant.

After the performance I went with several members of the company to the gates of Buckingham Palace, in the hope that the King and Queen would come out on the balcony.

It was the gayest scene—crowds round the Palace and boys riding about, cheering and shouting, on the tops of taxi-cabs; everybody in the streets singing and buying little flags and sticking them all over themselves.

I still have my tiny Union Jack that I bought for a penny on that fateful night outside the Palace.

How little any of us understood !

I remember walking back up the Haymarket, four of us, arm in arm, joining the crowds in their cheering and singing.

In the darkness, leaning against the railings, we came upon Herbert Tree.

His face was ashen. He seemed stricken. His whole manner was a shock to me. It was my first realization of the seriousness of it all. I never forgot the expression in his eyes. They were filled with the horror of the tragedy that was upon the world.

He stopped me and said, " You won't be singing those songs long, my dear." Then he passed on without another word.

He looked a broken man.

We, with our lesser comprehension, thought the declaration of war was only a bit of fun that would last for a week or two. How could we have been so stupid ? I sometimes think back to that gay night : the flashlights and the hooters and the laughing faces of the boys—a revelry of death indeed.

But we English, as a nation, did not understand war ; it had not touched any of us in our time, except the South African War, which was far away. There was a kind of romance about war for English people. Most other nations have known the horror of it within their memory, but we in England had only read about it in history books—the glorious Wars of the Roses, where everybody seemed to be victorious. We imagined the great romantic heroes like Richard Cœur de Lion and the Black Prince, and great fighters like Bolingbroke and Hotspur. There was no thought of the wounded and dying. In our glorious history of England we knew nothing of the horrible result of modern scientific fighting—cannon fodder.

I suppose that was why we accepted it so lightly at first. We did not understand.

But the change soon came. The first sinister touch



came with the dimming of the street lights. Theatres closed automatically. Nobody had any money. Gold was at a premium. There was a scare about paper money. People would come to the box-office and buy seats to change their five-pound notes and get some silver and gold, and go away again without entering the theatre. Naturally, most of the plays could not carry on.

The world was given over to marching and shouting and cheering and recruiting.

My mother was quite wonderful about it. She would not accept the war. She would not read the papers or allow us to speak of it, and she behaved as if such things were not possible. She loved life so much that she could not believe humanity could be so foolish as to bring upon itself that holocaust.

She used to say, "There are wise men governing us, and God will direct them. It will not be." In vain I tried to explain that the war was actually going on. She refused to believe it.

Then, one by one, our men friends went to France, and everybody rushed to enlist, and the women took up war work.

Still she would not believe.

She was resting more and staying in bed for whole days at a time, but never acknowledging the horror of the outside world, camouflaging always and joking and laughing about everything.

I must have been blind. I did not see that she was on her way.

So many people tried to prepare me, but I did not understand their hints and they hadn't the courage to tell me the truth, because they loved me too much.

Christmas was coming. We were always very sentimental about the festivals and tried to spend anniversaries together. She had a nurse by this time.

War was raging on . . . One could almost hear the guns across the sea. The world was spilling its life blood

Still she was calm and happy. She bought all her

Christmas presents and arranged our Christmas dinner, and in many ways I know now as I look back she gave me the line of life she wished me to follow.

She told me she did not believe in grief and suffering ; that life was the only thing to think of—never death ! She told me, in gentle hints, of her horror of mourning and graves, and that death was as beautiful as birth and should be regarded as a festival instead of a sorrow.

On the twenty-first of December, when she had supervised everything—the decoration of the holly and mistletoe round the pictures, the decorating of our little Christmas tree ; when her Christmas puddings were made, and the turkey ordered, and the presents prepared, she called me to her and told me she wanted this Christmas to be the happiest of all, and that I was to promise her to make it so. I promised.

I noticed how pretty she looked lying there, with her hair smoothly plaited into two little thin plaits with pink bows at the end of them. She was always very vain about her appearance.

I had a girl staying with me, and we went upstairs to my room.

My mother loved a little gramophone I had, so we turned it on that she might hear the gay little dance tune as she went to sleep.

Suddenly there was a knocking at the door, and the nurse was standing there, very white. I ran downstairs to her room.

She was lying still, a smile on her face, her little hands held out, the thumb and second finger meeting, the little finger crooked in the gesture of a dancer.

That was her beginning—and that was her end. Her soul danced away to that banal little tune. . . .

She was buried on Christmas Eve. I didn't go with the others to the funeral, but walked by myself along the path she had gone on her way to the grave. And there, on the road, lay a flower from her coffin that I am sure she sent me as her last remembrance.

We had our Christmas dinner—my father and I—and tried to be cheerful and carry out her wishes in every way. In the evening a friend took me to dinner at the Carlton. I dressed in my best and gayest frock, as she had bade me. I hadn't eaten or slept, and they gave me wine, and in my distress, I suppose, I got drunk for the first and only time in my life. . . .

Although I missed her so, and always shall, I am glad she went when she did—before the air-raids started and the wounded began to come home.

The world was too full of sadness for her gay and radiant spirit.

The only thing to make me forget was work, and I threw myself into everything I could think of to stifle my agony of loneliness. I founded the Arts Fund, which helped all artists a little, and did all I could to be of service in the only way I knew—the theatre way.

It was useless for me to try and nurse. I have a certain gift of organization, and I arranged matinées and benefits and did what I could to raise money for the funds, as did all of us. Sometimes we appeared at six or seven places a day for charities and entertainments to raise money.

My profession was quite magnificent in their devotion to the cause; not that everybody else in England was not exactly alike, but I came in contact with my own people more than with the rest of the world, and I saw constant evidence of their splendid self-forgetfulness and undying energy.

My husband was in America, and we were in despair because he could not pass for service. Three times he tried, and each time was rejected by the Medical Board. He sent me his rejection cards each time, and I kept them in a row on my mantelpiece. He was broken-hearted at not being accepted. I don't think people realized the tremendous strain that drastic training meant to men of the theatre—twenty-five-mile route marches and being on parade at seven in the morning when they had been used to drifting about the whole day long and beginning

the serious work of their lives at eight o'clock at night, and only three hours' work at that !

They were completely out of training ; therefore their eagerness was all the more worthy. They never shirked but tried with heart and soul to make themselves as fit as the regular soldiers. Not that it was any particular credit to them, as every Englishman longed to fight for England and earn their right to be proud of the spirit of England. But I think it was a little harder for the layman, for clerks and actors and painters and musicians and people who sat in offices all day, than for the trained regular soldiers.

## CHAPTER XXXII

I COULD not bear to go back to my empty house on the hill, so I took rooms in an hotel in Jermyn Street. I wasn't playing at the time, but, tired out with committees and organization, I would go to bed about nine o'clock and lie in the dark and think for hours of all that was gone; I, who had never thought of going to sleep before two o'clock in the morning in the pre-war days.

The only few hours of relaxation we actors get is after the play, at night. All day long we remember our parts, and there is constant restriction about our voices; or we have to rest and take care of ourselves for our evening's performance. But the minute the play is over we are free for a few hours to live our lives as we please.

But all this was changed. We began our war work at eight o'clock in the morning and went on steadily all day.

I remember one gloomy, sullen night, when the word had gone round that an air-raid was expected, going back to my dreary hotel bedroom, one dim light burning—restrictions were then in full swing. It was one of those nights when London seemed to be listening for some unaccountable happening, as it always did when the moon was full. I was so worn out that I fell asleep in spite of my dread. I had been asleep about an hour when my telephone rang and Sir Herbert said I must get up and dress and come down to the theatre, as he was terribly tired and a journalist from Paris had come to see him and he felt hardly able to talk. I declined at



first, but he was so insistent that I roused myself and dressed and went to the theatre.

We supped at the Carlton, four of us—John Raphael, a French lady, myself and Sir Herbert. He wasn't in his best mood and made no effort to be entertaining, and I felt sorry for John Raphael. Sir Herbert didn't happen to like anybody that particular night, and his moods were so variable he could not disguise them.

I often helped him out in these situations and gathered that that was why I had been sent for this particular evening. I might have refused to go. It would have been quite easy, as I was tired and afraid of the raid. Or Sir Herbert might have been too irritable to go to supper. A thousand things might have happened, but they didn't. And it was a fateful night for me.

The conversation was very strained and stilted. The raid did not take place and our nerves, relieved at the tension, made the party seem flatter than ever.

The lady could not understand English, and John Raphael tried his best to be amusing only to be met by Sir Herbert's blank blue eyes, which were stultifying, to say the least, when he wanted them to be. He did not mean to be unkind, but something had worried him in the theatre and the war was getting on his nerves terribly.

Nobody spoke at last but John Raphael and me! We tried several subjects, and at last we got on to books. I told him of my favourite three, that I carried everywhere and always kept by my bed. One of them was "Peter Ibbetson."

He brightened up and told me how he loved the book, and that when he was young he had written a play on it. Sir Herbert roused himself to remark "that everybody had a skeleton in his cupboard." This didn't aid matters.

The poor author flushed, and I began to get angry with Sir Herbert's unkindness and wished I had stayed in bed. I could see John Raphael's feelings were hurt. He told me that he had taken the play round to managers for twenty years, and everybody had laughed at it. To



be polite, I asked him to send it to me, and he said he would do so. He was grateful, I think. I just wanted to soothe that hurt look in his eyes. We said good night, and I didn't think about John Raphael again.

The play came to me about a month later. It was on an air-raid night also, oddly enough.

I had been for a long tramp with a friend round the silent streets, and as I entered my hotel the porter gave me the parcel. I went upstairs to my room, undid the string and put the shabby script beside my bed. I opened the window wide. It was one of those hot and melancholy nights when the sound of the traffic in London's wooden streets seemed extra loud, as if the air were electric and everything in the world came through a loud speaker.

I could not go to sleep. I took up the first act and began to read—and then I read on and on. The sirens sounded. There was a raid—not a very bad one—but I didn't leave my room to go downstairs as usual. There was some spiritual force in the play that gave me unwonted courage. I, who trembled and quaked through those raids, went on calmly reading.

I read the play through twice. It was four in the morning when I had finished. I sat on my bed thinking.

The swirl of a belated taxi-cab now and then was the only disturbing note.

Presently I heard the familiar morning sounds beginning, the hoofs of the horses as they dragged the vegetable carts to Covent Garden. Then it struck five.

By that time I had made up my mind that, if I never did anything else in my life, I would produce "Peter Ibbetson."

I hadn't a penny in the world; I hadn't any theatre; I hadn't any company—nothing but that old dirty script that everybody laughed at.

Fate adores decision. She soon gave me my opportunity. The next morning I was asked to arrange a *matinée* for the Base Hospital at Étaples by the Countess

of Huntingdon. I was tired out and felt incapable of even attending a meeting, much less organizing anything, but "Peter Ibbetson" was never out of my mind. I told the committee, if they would allow me to do exactly as I pleased and lend me a small sum of money and ask no questions, I would arrange a performance for them that would exceed all their expectations.

They were a little amazed at my conditions, but they wrote me a cheque for £500 and gave it to me on trust.

Then I rang up John Raphael and told him that, if he would go back to Paris and promise not to appear until the dress rehearsal and allow me to alter the play as I thought fit, I would produce "Peter Ibbetson" with the greatest cast that could be given to a dramatic performance. He went away quite happily, thankful for my enthusiasm, never believing I should bring off my project. I rewrote and changed nearly every scene.

Then I went to Clara Butt and told her my plan, and although she thought it quite beyond the bounds of reason she said she would do anything to help me.

Then I went to Henry Ainley, with whom I had played so often. For the sake of those young days, he said he would do anything I wanted. Owen Nares, who was playing at His Majesty's at the time, also consented to appear. Lilian Braithwaite, without knowing what I wanted her to do, gave her consent. I rewrote some of the play and had the parts typed, and asked them all, one morning, to meet me on the stage of the Vaudeville Theatre.

They were very gay and excited at my mystery, and when I handed them their parts they were wonderful and agreed to do the play. None of them had heard the script, and it was a great demand on their time and energy to ask them to study long parts in a strange, mysterious play that had been hawked about London for over twenty years and no manager would accept.

The next thing was to get the theatre.

I had never asked any particular favour of Sir Herbert



AS 'MARY DUCHESS OF TOWERS' IN 'PETER IBBETSON'



before, but I had a feeling the play belonged to His Majesty's. I pleaded and begged, and for a long time Sir Herbert held out. His manager, Henry Dana, thought the whole thing ridiculous. The theatre was to close for the season, and already there was the King George Pension Fund *matinée* of "Henry VIII" to do, followed by another charity performance, and then the staff were to go on their holiday. However, I at last prevailed on Sir Herbert, and he reluctantly consented and gave us a date. It was a very bad date, at the very end of the season—the 23rd of July—when everybody had gone abroad or to the country and the theatre was closed.

But I knew there was some spirit in the play that nothing could defeat, and I had no fear. By chance I met Gerald du Maurier, who did not like the idea of his father's wonderful book being dramatized at all, and who would, I think, have stopped the whole thing had it not been for his friendship for me. Instead, he was kindness itself, and came and supervised some of the rehearsals.

It was nothing to do with me; it was the spirit of the play that drew everybody to it. They all said I was bound to lose the money I had been lent, but, as soon as our posters went up, we were practically sold out within two days, and after the *matinée* I was able to hand the committee a cheque for £1700. The book went into fresh editions and was resold everywhere. The surprise and delight of John Raphael was touching, though he hardly recognized his play.

"Peter Ibbetson" is the play I have loved best and taken the greatest joy in acting in my whole career. I think I have justified a few of my mistakes in life by giving that play to the public. George du Maurier's story brought great comfort to the world during the war. Later, when we did the play, widows and mothers and fathers and brothers, who had lost their dear ones, would come and see it over and over again and find hope and inspiration. Many have told me it has saved them from despair.

On the 7th of May, 1915, I was lunching at the Carlton with Laurette Taylor and her husband, and the news came of the sinking of the "Lusitania," and, to our added horror, we remembered that Charles Frohman had been on board. Four of us took the train that night and went to Holyhead, and tried to cross to Queenstown, to be with him, but there was some hitch with the Government officials, and they would not allow us to board the boat, and we had to return to London. Not that it could have done any good, but dear C. F. was so fond of having people about him that he liked that we felt we wanted to be there so that he would not be with strangers.

Two or three days afterwards I was taken by Hadden Chambers to see a friend who had been saved from the wreck, and who had stood beside Charles Frohman when the torpedo hit the ship.

Dramatic moments—strangely undramatic, as ever. She told us what had taken place. They were standing by one of the gangways, waiting to go down to lunch, talking about plays, and when the shuddering blow came they paused for a moment in their conversation and looked at each other, and then went on talking—about the same things.

When the ship began to go down and they realized what had happened, and the water was nearly to the top deck, they all took hands, but Charles Frohman's grip relaxed, and they never saw him again. Almost his last words were a quotation from his beloved Barrie: "To die would be an awfully great adventure."



## CHAPTER XXXIII

**T**HEN an offer came for me to go to Hollywood. I was longing to see my husband—we had been parted for so long ; and so much had happened to me in the interim and my nerves were in such a bad shape that the doctors refused to let me stay in London.

So I crossed the Atlantic with a life-belt on, in the height of the submarine scare. It wasn't very pleasant. There are always alarmists on board, and they spent their time thinking they saw black shadows under the water, and prophesying imaginary attacks, and frightening the timid passengers out of their wits. But nothing happened.

I spent one day in New York with my husband, and then had to leave him and go 3000 miles to California. We never calculated distances in those days—Julian and I—and I had to go just as far away from him as if I had stayed in England.

How wonderful the journey is on the Santa Fé Railway ! Albuquerque, where the last of the Indians have their locations—strange men in full regalia, looking hundreds of years old, hawk-like women, young girls, their faces tanned and seared by cruel restrictions—this noble race, who once owned the island of Manhattan and sold it for a bottle of whisky and twenty-five dollars !

There are very few of them left, but they are wonderfully picturesque and dignified. They come to the train to meet you, and sell you little mats and beads and tiny wooden gods they have carved to eke out their meagre existence.

They look like eagles and kings, and the world no longer has a place for them.

Then on across the desert. Never shall I forget the first night I saw it, green and iridescent under the moon. The cactus trees sway all the time and seem to get into grotesque attitudes and change positions—like witches, dancing! There are no birds or beasts, but millions of rattlesnakes lurking under the stones. It is sinister and beautiful beyond belief.

Then on—into the sun of California. You pull up at Los Angeles, after those five days' journey, dazed and giddy when the motion of the train ceases. You get out opposite an ostrich farm. The grotesque birds look prehistoric as they stalk about—half naked. The sun of California is so soft and warm, and the Pacific Ocean so blue and calm.

Tip tap . . . The scene was changed indeed. How could one believe that on the other side there was London with the women suffering and working and waiting . . . and there was France with splendid boys and men—old and young—giving their heart's blood?

It was hard to believe it was the same world.

My nerves were in a terrible state and I felt myself a deserter, but the doctors had ordered me away, and for months, lying under the radiant stars with the coyote calling on the hills, I would wake and start up trembling, thinking I heard the siren's warning that a raid was coming. I had a little bungalow with great magnolia trees in the garden, and bushes of mimosa. Mimosa had been so tender to me when I had been in Paris. Mother and I had bought ourselves a little spray on a spring morning when we first went there together, and here it grew in almost too great profusion, and all the sentiment of orange blossoms seemed lost when there were groves of them all around you. I suppose one could get satiated with anything.

But as the calm weeks went by my nerves began to recover.

What a strange world it was !

We had to be dressed and made up on the "lot" at nine o'clock in the morning. Exquisite young girls, old men and women, flotsam and jetsam of the world, all mixed up—grotesque costumes, wild animals, yellow faces—hundreds of us herded together in those early days when pictures were just coming into their own.

There was an old lion there. He had no teeth and his coat was very mangy, but he was amiable and kind and acted in the comedies. He was a great friend of mine.

There we would be, waiting for the sun, for the right moment to "shoot" !

It was a terribly monotonous life and had none of the quick response of the theatre. There would be several pictures being taken at the same time—love scenes, murders—the cameras clicking, orchestras playing and guns going off amid general confusion. At six o'clock, unless there was a special picture to wait for, we went home.

Hollywood was still a village, with farms that had not yet been built over, and the surly farmers were furious at the advent of the picture folk. Now there are great mansions everywhere, and wonderful estates, and the farms are no more—and the farmers, I suppose, are millionaires. But in those days there was one main street and a little hotel. The "stars" either lived there or in a few little bungalows that had been built up quickly. The studios were about five miles outside Los Angeles, and when you had finished your day's work you were generally too tired to go there, so you would go home, have a bath, change your clothes and meet the same people over again, their faces white instead of yellow.

You either had to love them or hate them ; there was nothing else possible.

I remember somebody telling me the story of the German prisoners : how they came to Donington Hall and were amazed at the loveliness of the house and

grounds, and how delighted and contented they were after the turmoil of the trenches.

They would start off, in the first days, cheerfully for their walks and, at the edge of the park, they would come to the barbed wire limitations. They didn't mind at first, but gradually the barbed wire got them and they realized that, however beautiful their surroundings, it was still a prison.

I felt like those prisoners of war in Hollywood. Not that I did not adore the people and the place, but the fact that there was nothing else to do and nowhere else to go, and the sun never left off shining, and the Pacific Ocean never had a wave on it, was stultifying. I longed for a good London drizzle and a bit of fog; but each day was as radiant as the day before, and the sky as blue.

Charles Chaplin used to come to dinner with me very often, and we would talk about London, and the Lambeth Road, and Kennington, and all the places we had known in our youth. He was a strange, morbid, romantic creature, seemingly totally unconscious of the greatness that was in him. How he loved England! And yet the years he had spent there had been so bitter and full of poverty and sorrow. America had given him all, and his allegiance belonged to her, but in our talks one felt his longing, sometimes, to see the twisted streets and misty days and hear Big Ben chiming over London.

We would have our dinner on my little balcony, with the sky so full of stars that they seemed to touch the earth and mingle with the electric lights of the distant town, and my fantastic little Japanese maid waited on us. She was a princess in disguise, I think.

Sometimes we would steal down to Los Angeles and have a meal at a cafetaria, and Charlie would wait on me, fetch my coffee and thick sandwiches, or bread and cheese, and we would talk for hours. He was happier this way. It was impossible to go to the big restaurants, as the minute he appeared he was mobbed. Besides, he

said he couldn't bear the masses of knives and forks on the table, and the magnificence of the head waiters gave him a feeling of inferiority.

He didn't like luxury in those days. He hated to drive in a car—he said it made him feel nervous—but I expect he has got used to it by this time.

He remembered all the plays and every actor he had seen in England, and described to me how he used to sit in the gallery at His Majesty's whenever he could spare a shilling or two, and would give up his meal for his seat.

He worshipped the theatre and had the same reverence for it as had that other great comedian I had once met—Dan Leno.

One would never have thought of Charlie Chaplin as funny in those long, serious talks we had.

Then—some nights—his moods would quite change, and he would be ridiculous and make me laugh until I was ill. He would pretend to be a German or a Frenchman or an Italian and invent an imaginary language, and keep it up so wonderfully that he really looked like the part he was assuming. He would keep up this mood for hours and insist on answering serious questions with that same absurd accent.

I was the unconscious corner stone on which the foundation of the Allied Artists Corporation was built; for I introduced Charlie Chaplin to Douglas Fairbanks.

They had never met, and one night I took Charles to dinner at Douglas Fairbanks' house. They were a bit shy and self-conscious during the early part of the evening, but from that day on their friendship never wavered.

I had made two or three pictures in Los Angeles when Sir Herbert cabled me that he had had an offer to do the picture of "Macbeth," and asked if I would play Lady Macbeth. He said he was coming out and bringing his daughter Iris with him.

I wrote glowing accounts to them of Los Angeles and the wonderful Californian sun, and filled them with such



enthusiasm that they were impatient of everything until they could start. I chose them a bungalow with a lovely tennis court and pretty garden round it, and begged them to bring bathing dresses, and I told Iris she must have nothing but the lightest summer clothes.

The day they arrived the floods started—and never stopped for two months!

The rain poured down.

The tennis court was a tank; water came through the roof! They froze with the cold. Iris had nothing but summer frocks, and I don't believe Sir Herbert had a warm overcoat.

The summer bungalow I had chosen didn't have any central heating, and the chimneys were built so wide that when we tried to light the fire the rain poured down and put it out. That bungalow leaked everywhere! It was built for the sun!

Everybody in Los Angeles told us that the floods had started long before they were expected. In fact, they were having, as Sir Herbert called it, "the usual unusual weather." It was a terrible time. I never heard the end of those bathing dresses, and they teased me all the time about the wonderful Californian sun I had boasted about.

Herbert Tree and Charlie Chaplin became great friends, and so, in spite of all we endured, we were very gay, the four of us, in the evenings in that dreary little sitting-room.

We worked hard in the studio in spite of the floods. There were many times when we were there until three or four in the morning if we had to stay and take some special effect by flares through the downpour.

It was perfect weather for the witches and the blasted heath!

Sometimes we would leave the studio too tired to change our costumes.

One night, I remember Herbert Tree, still in Macbeth's wig and beard and dress, his daughter's mackintosh wrapped round him, myself with long strands of black



hair down to my knees, flowing robes and a crown, and somebody's overcoat over my head, going along Sunset Boulevard in the drenching rain because we had been too kind-hearted to keep the chauffeur waiting all night, and there was nobody else at the studio to give us a lift.

We must have looked deplorable, and we had a good half a mile walk to get to our respective homes.

If anyone could have seen us who had known His Majesty's! I used to think of the scarlet-coated flunkys with their white wigs, and the pomp and splendour of the theatre.

Iris Tree was our solace. She was full of humour and kept everybody going. Even in those stark dawns she was in a good temper.

Sir Herbert did not understand the method of picture-making, and had long arguments with the director as to whether the whole text of Shakespeare should be spoken or not. He won, as ever, and insisted on speaking every word. But the camera man was obstinate too. He invented a dummy machine, and kept the two cameras working at the same time. The dummy didn't register anything, but satisfied Sir Herbert, and when the speeches came to an end the real camera took the picture.

Sir Herbert didn't find out this trick until the picture was completed. Then he was as amused as anyone.

If anybody had the wit to score off him, he was delighted. It didn't often happen.

Herbert Tree was adored by everybody in the studio, particularly the cowboys who came to Hollywood. His attitude to the whole thing was magnificent, although, in his soul, he was hurt many times, I am sure.

There was a different class of people in the studios in those days.

Suddenly the picture industry had loomed on the horizon and became the fifth biggest industry of America, and Hollywood was the centre of it.

Many slackers drifted to Los Angeles because they couldn't find any place in their own country. When the

picture boom started they were on the spot and found themselves in possession of power, but the old adage of "A beggar on horseback" is a very true one.

Some of them made good, but a great many failed and sank into oblivion, as dross finds its level at the bottom!

Few of them had the grace to show a great artist like Sir Herbert the deference that was due to him. I think they resented his presence, and he would be kept waiting five or six hours, tired out, amid the crowd; but he never complained and would laugh and be as amusing as ever.

There were marvellous people there too, people of rare quality and genius—D. W. Griffith and Lilian Gish, and others, who went out of their way to show him extra respect and make his life in the new environment as pleasant as possible. Our own particular director was kindness itself, a man of culture and understanding—John Emerson, the husband of Anita Loos, and now head of American Equity.

It was a great privilege to work under D. W. Griffith, who supervised our picture towards the end.

He was a strange being to encounter in that mad medley of humanity, delicate and sensitive to a degree, with strange fantastic dreams that he somehow managed to make commercial.

He was a king in Hollywood.

With his vivid imagination he had carved for himself a unique place and a power and a control over the people who worked for him that nobody else seemed to possess.

He used to take me sometimes on his stand when he was producing "Intolerance."

The set for this picture was gigantic and took up great fields of space. All the buildings were solid. It was up for the two years that I was in Hollywood, and cost a colossal sum of money to build. Sometimes he would have 500 or 600 people working in a scene. He had a stand with three tiers running on a little railway track all over the set. On the top he would be stationed with a

megaphone, the camera men beside him and assistants on the stand below. Any guests that he invited to see the "take" were on the ground floor. It was like a house built in three tiers, and could be pushed all over the lot, so that nothing need be disturbed and he could photograph from any angle.

He never had a scenario, but would take miles and miles of film that never saw the light of day.

He told me that for "Intolerance" he had taken enough film to make three pictures of that length.

How he held in his brain the continuity of his story was absolutely beyond understanding.

He would direct every figure in the scene.

On the day when the climax of "Intolerance" came and the towers were to be burned and the battle was to take place, he invited me on to the stand to see the "take."

There were about 500 men fighting and struggling, and some women and horses, and so enthused were they by D. W.'s voice and manner that they really fought almost to the death.

Several men were deputed to guard the gates when the chief gave the order "Set the towers on fire." It was a marvellous sight! The flames leapt up into the sky. There were men in the topmost turrets, and Mr. Griffith called to them through the megaphone to hurry down, that dummies would be substituted and were to be thrown from the top of the building in their place; but the men refused to budge—so in the spirit of his mood were they—and insisted on jumping down into the crowd themselves to give the picture realism!

The flames leapt about them.

Some of them broke their legs and arms, and the ambulance went backwards and forwards, but they were wild with excitement and absolutely reckless and would have done anything for D. W. Griffith.

I was scorched by the flames and could not get off the stand, and I was really frightened that I should be burned to death and forgotten, as they all seemed so absorbed

in their work that they were beyond all thought of anything so unimportant as me.

The flames were so high that the fire brigade in Los Angeles, several miles away, saw them and were called out and rushed to our assistance. When the engines reached the barred gates they were kept at bay, much to their rage, until the last flickering ashes had died down and the picture was complete.

Then they rushed in, furious at the interference with the law, and spurted water over the ashes!

But the fire was out and the picture was taken, and "Intolerance" came to the world.

## CHAPTER XXXIV

**I**T is a very sensitive moment, the first time an artist sees himself on the screen, and it is a great honour to be asked into the dark room and shown the "take" among the privileged few who have put up the money and backed the picture, and the art directors and special critics.

We were all excited when the day came we were to see the first "running" of "Macbeth."

We filed into the little private theatre thrilled and nervous, and the lights were turned down. It was a tense moment. Much was at stake. There was a hushed silence.

I was sitting by Sir Herbert when the projecting machine began to click. There were the most important people connected with the picture in the room, and everybody was waiting in the greatest excitement to hear Sir Herbert's verdict after the first view of himself on the screen. He was excited too, though not unduly. He had been working very hard and the room was very hot.

The picture started, and several of the important scenes went on. Everybody was very pleased and talked in whispers in the dark.

I spoke to Sir Herbert several times as the pictures were flashed on the screen, but could get no response from him.

I thought he was so absorbed that he did not want to be disturbed. When the running was over there was a sigh of admiration and delight in the darkness, and whispered congratulations on the magnificence of the photography, acting, etc. All were waiting eagerly for

the word of Sir Herbert. Not a sound came. There was a pause.

The lights were turned up.

He was asleep. . . .

Gradually the floods and the rain subsided. We had lovely days in Hollywood when the telephone would ring and tell us we should not be wanted at the studio. We would drive along Sunset Boulevard (I loved that name) out to Venice and have our dinner at some little inn looking over the Pacific.

Charlie Chaplin would go with us too on those jaunts. He had the greatest admiration for Herbert Tree, whose eccentricities in the unusual environment of the picture world were more marked than ever.

Or there were long summery days on location, when we had to start out in cars and drive into the lovely Californian hills to find a place to take our picture.

I shall never forget Sir Herbert's exit from Hollywood. The cowboys, as I say, adored him, and they insisted on accompanying him to the station on their bucking horses, dressed in full regalia, with pistols!

Sir Herbert was essentially a man of peace, and he hated guns. He was an indoor man.

Some of us have indoor and some of us outdoor natures, if you know what I mean.

As the train was starting the cowboys encircled Sir Herbert and made their horses rear with their hoofs over his head, then, with one accord, they fired their pistols into the air as farewell.

He was very honoured—but the alacrity with which he climbed into the train was remarkable.

His face at the window had a look of supreme relief as the train began to draw out of the station and he waved us farewell.

He loved those cowboys, and he deeply appreciated their friendly act and talked of it always.

Iris Tree stayed behind with me for some time, and we



lived in the bungalow with our Japanese maids. I would go to work at the studio, and Iris rode over the country, and occasionally spent a day at home writing her lovely poems. She inherited her father's great gifts. If only she had inherited his energy too! But, in those days, she did not work as he did.

She hardly writes at all now. What a pity!

All this time I had my script of "Peter Ibbetson," and the thought of it was constantly in my mind, though it seemed as if my dream could never materialize and I should never get it played in America.

The only person I could confide in who understood exactly how I felt was Edward Sheldon, who from the first had shown the deepest interest and sympathy with me in my desire to do it.

The person I thought of all the time for the part of Peter was John Barrymore.

It seemed beyond the bounds of possibility that he would ever dream of playing it. He had played in many comedies, and made a dramatic success in Galsworthy's "Justice," but had never attempted a romantic part. Besides, he was inundated with offers, so why should he think of a play that everybody said was non-commercial?

John Barrymore was a great friend of Edward Sheldon's, and when I got back to New York at the end of my picture season he told me that he had almost persuaded him to play it.

I formed a little syndicate among my friends, who gave me half the amount I wanted. Then I wrote to Lee Shubert.

It was a peculiar play to read to a busy manager, with telephones ringing in every direction and people coming in and out of the room with cables and messages and notes on bits of paper. It was hard to make him concentrate and explain that the play had no form or character, and was only a mood and about dreams; hard to make him visualize the character of Peter standing on

the stage as himself, three times (lying on a sofa dreaming that he saw himself as a young man speaking to the little boy who was his youth).

Mr. Shubert listened politely as long as he could, and was very kind about the whole matter, but a little sceptical.

I have always found Mr. Shubert most sympathetic to me in anything I have asked him to do and, although he thought me a little crazy, he promised to share in the production with me before I left the room.

Then came the amazing news that John Barrymore had consented to play Peter. With his name it was easy to get more capital, but we were limited as to means and the production was a much heavier one than we had anticipated.

Everybody helped us. Again the spirit of the play was at work.

Maude Adams supervised the lights, Edward Sheldon rewrote some of the scenes, Florenz Ziegfeld lent us his special electric stands to set our effects. We could not have bought them if we had had all the money in the world, as they were specially made.

People were wonderful and helped us in every way they could, but, most wonderful of all, Lionel Barrymore—who had given up the stage, more or less, and had been painting in Paris—returned to New York about this time.

The part of Colonel Ibbetson was played magnificently in London by Henry Ainley. It needed a really great actor! It was perhaps the most difficult and exacting rôle in the play to cast, as it had not the sympathy of the audience and depended entirely on brilliant acting. We could not think how to cast it, as Mr. Ainley was engaged in London; but, again, Fate seemed to be working for the play, and Lionel Barrymore was persuaded to return to the stage to act it. He gave a truly amazing performance—subtle, cruel, gay, with a certain horrible charm. He drenched himself in scent—musk or patchouli—to give himself atmosphere. It made me shudder

when I smelt it in the wings . . . That perfume could only belong to Colonel Ibbetson.

It was a great stroke of luck that Lionel Barrymore came home when he did.

A. H. Woods, who had some money in the production, sat at the rehearsals and cried, and swore he didn't know what the play was about, but that he couldn't help himself. He is full of real sentiment, although a little ashamed of it.

Then came a terrible blow. Everything was going along beautifully when the manager came to me, a few nights before the production, and said we had no more money in the bank, and that I could not afford another dress rehearsal!

We had only had two, and the play was full of mechanical tricks and changes of scenes and lights.

However, we could not help ourselves, and when the first night came we were two dress rehearsals short.

The theatre was crowded—John Barrymore's following is gigantic. From the moment the curtain went up and the play began every member of the audience was caught and enveloped in the mood of the story. It was extraordinary how they responded and understood. Managers had said American audiences were too sophisticated to stand so sentimental a play.

But nobody knows where success lies in the theatre.

The public adored it, and "Peter Ibbetson" became the fashion, but on the first night, when we came to the scene in the forest which in the dream is supposed to fade into the opera house with Patti singing "Mignon" (a rôle she never played, but that is stage licence), we had a serious accident. It was a most difficult change and required at least a week's rehearsal for the staff.

John Barrymore and I were alone on the stage, hand in hand, walking in ecstasy up to the wide-open doors, when, to our horror, the scene slowly began to fall! We could see it moving, but we could do nothing. And the

entire opera house collapsed on top of us, and the curtain had to be lowered.

This, in the ordinary way, would have meant immediate disaster. We didn't know what to do. The audience were waiting sympathetically, and hadn't moved from their seats. So we decided to have the scenery hauled into position and start the act all over again.

The public were magnificent. There wasn't a titter or a smile, and when the final curtain descended the play's triumph was complete. It was a remarkable experience for both of us, and we talked it over when the scene was finished and decided nothing so bad could ever happen again, and, as John Barrymore said, "Railway accidents don't happen twice in the same place."

He was wrong!

The second night the scenery fell down in exactly the same place.

We hadn't had sufficient time or money or staff to get the mechanism right. But, after that, the play ran for two years.

I remember that first night so well. When it was all over I slipped away with Edward Sheldon, and we went to a little cafeteria in Broadway and sat at a marble-topped table and talked it over.

Nobody but taxi-drivers and working people were there, and so we seemed to have the world to ourselves, as they were too hungry and too interested in their suppers to bother about us.

I felt I couldn't face parties and crowds of strange people, and the only thing I wanted in the world was to be with my beloved friend, who had brought this wonderful thing about.

As the Duchess of Towers I made more friends with the American public than in any part I have played there, and the play established John Barrymore as the leading romantic actor on the American stage.

And yet it wasn't a play at all! It had no sequence or construction; it broke every rule of good play-writing,



WITH JOHN BARRYMORE AS 'PETER' IN 'PETER IBBETSON'





but I am sure the secret of its success was that it captured the mood of du Maurier absolutely, and that means so much more in the theatre than technical construction.

If a play creates its own atmosphere it is safe. It is like the personality of a great actor who is beloved—the public forget his faults.

When we started on tour the second year, in the height of our success, John Barrymore was taken ill in Chicago and had to leave the cast immediately. There was nobody who could possibly replace him, so we had to close. It was wonderful he lasted as long as he did, for the rôle was a terrible strain on his voice and his nerves, but he held on as long as possible and worked up to the last moment. So the company broke up, and we returned to New York.

My husband was in Canada, in the Air Force.

He got in through the influence of a friend. He wasn't fit physically, but he was delighted and content at last. And everything seemed to be going smoothly. I wasn't very well, and before returning to England I decided to have a rest of a fortnight in a nursing home. I hadn't heard any special news from England for several weeks, as I had been touring far away.

I had a little cottage on the coast of England.

When the Government decided to do away with the coast-guards, Lena Ashwell bought up four of the cottages, and I took one. It was very tiny, with two bedrooms and a sitting-room and a kitchen, but there was an old sea wall and a view of the Goodwin Sands in the distance, and a little garden with a few roses and hollyhocks and sunflowers. It was strangely peaceful and beautiful and cost very little money—I think I paid seventeen pounds a year for it. Everybody loved it. We had the cheapest kitchen furniture, and Mother made the curtains and chair covers, and everybody who came there helped with the housework and did a little carpentering.

It was so primitive that we had to draw the water from the well.

But all my wealthy friends adored that cottage.

I hardly ever got any use of it myself at all, as I was always lending it. They would borrow the key and my maid and go down there for a picnic.

Clara Butt and Kennerley Rumford, in spite of their beautiful home, loved to crowd into it for a week-end of rest, and they would be quite happy, although Clara Butt, who is very tall, could hardly stand upright in it.

My maid, who had been with me for many years, was very intelligent and had a great personality. She was as well known as myself among my intimate friends, and she would pilot them down to the cottage and go and look after them, and there they would rest and hide from the world.

It was a complete change from the busy life we all lived in London.

Sir Herbert Tree adored the cottage most of all. He would borrow my maid and the cottage, buy all sorts of cold food from Fortnum and Mason (enough to stock a garrison) and go down there all by himself and work for long days at a time, and motor back to London in the evening for the theatre.

My maid was a born boss.

She was the only person I ever knew who could dominate Sir Herbert. She would make him draw water from the well and boil the kettle for tea and order him about like a handy-man.

He loved it. It was fun for him. He spent his life giving orders, and it was a change to have to obey some one else ; so he humoured her.

One awful day, at the nursing home in New York, I opened the papers and read of Sir Herbert's death. I had no idea what was happening, or that he had managed to find my maid and was using the cottage. He had a great deal of writing to do and was making speeches for the Government every day, and I suppose it was the quietest place he could think of to work out his ideas.

And so he went there without asking my permission. He knew I should be only too delighted for him to go there and use it.

The cottage was an old-fashioned one. In the middle it had a small, steep, winding staircase with a handrail that I had always meant to have taken away, as it suddenly stopped at the most unexpected place and you found yourself holding on to nothing.

I suppose Sir Herbert must have gone upstairs in the dark.

In any case, he slipped and fell, and broke his kneecap.

They took him to a nursing home, but the shock was too much.

I sold the cottage, and never saw it again.

What a dreadful loss he was to me and to everybody who knew him !

I couldn't believe that he was gone.

He took with him so much of the splendour and great purpose of the theatre.

His Majesty's was no more, like a light that was extinguished. He had been kind and generous to me for many years, and had given me my great chances on the stage.

I am so proud that he found me intelligent enough to bestow his friendship on me.

We were true comrades, and he told me his troubles and joys and was utterly uncomplicated and simple in all the years I knew him.

If I felt a blank at his death, and a frightful sense of loss, the whole theatrical profession shared this with me. In the years that have gone his place has never been refilled, and his loss is felt more keenly now than even at the time he died.

There is no great theatre in England any more.

No Mecca for the young aspirants.

No company to which it is a great privilege to belong. We sell our talents now to the highest bidder.

When Sir Herbert died a great deal of the magnificence of the theatre died too.

It has never been quite the same since.

## CHAPTER XXXV

I WAS so unhappy about Sir Herbert's death that I decided not to return to England, but stayed in America for a further year.

I always wanted to produce Oscar Wilde's play, "The Ideal Husband." My husband had been very ill in Canada, and was sent down for a long leave. He had never realized his ambition in the theatre.

At last his chance came. He was very suited for the part of Lord Goring, the part played in London by Charles Hawtrey. It was a wonderful high-comedy part and needed great distinction. It was our first chance of acting together since the old days at His Majesty's, and so we were delighted and went to work to get the play produced.

Lee Shubert again befriended me, although I don't think he believed much in the play. He gave me very little money to do it on, but I had the free run of his storehouse, and I stayed in New York all one sultry summer picking up bits of furniture and having it repainted and touched up and the scenery restored.

No one knows what a summer in New York is like unless they have lived through one, when the heat scorches your feet through the soles of your shoes.

But I didn't mind anything as long as I could get the play on the stage.

When the dress rehearsal came Mr. Shubert was there, and was delighted.

He is a splendid manager to work for, because he leaves you alone and, if you produce good results for him, he is content and doesn't want to interfere.

To every one's satisfaction, the play was a great success, and Julian came into his own at last. He was so good that Mr. Shubert promised, when the war was over, he should be starred in his own play.

We were very happy.

Julian made a much better success in the play than I did. But I didn't mind that ; we were now on an equal footing in our profession.

But, alas, Fate never intends things should be as one expects.

The terrible influenza scourge of 1918 started ; people were dying like flies in New York, and there weren't enough doctors or nurses to attend to them, or even coffins to bury them.

We were playing a *matinée* one Wednesday, and the following week he was buried. . . .

Everybody thought I was hysterical and tried to persuade me to go back to work, as they feared for my reason ; besides, it was very hard on the company with two of the principal actors out, but I couldn't, hard as I tried. I couldn't hear the same lines from a stranger when my dead husband's voice was in every one of them.

I couldn't bear the thought of the stage, and I wrote to Mr. Shubert and explained exactly how I felt and, although it was a great blow to him to have his success spoilt by such tragic circumstances, he booked my passage and sent me back to England.

I thought I had said good-bye to America for ever. I thought I would never return !

When I landed in England I was too ill to act for a time, and I could not get over my horror of the theatre, but I needed the money, so I put on " Peter Ibbetson " at the Savoy with Basil Rathbone as Peter.

I had seen him play a small part with Frank Benson's company. He was a shabby, poor young man in those days, but his beauty and talent shone out conspicuously when I went to see him act.



Playing in "Peter Ibbetson" restored my mental balance, as there is some spiritual quality in the play that soothes the soul, I think.

I then accepted a picture contract for a year with the Ideal Film Company, and then I played in an all-star picture of "The Bohemian Girl" with Gladys Cooper, Ellen Terry and Ivor Novello. But I never seemed to get a grip on my health in spite of my marvellous constitution. The shock of my husband's death had been too great, and I got gradually worse. It was a great struggle to finish the picture.

Ivor Novello's kindness to me through that time was remarkable. We became great friends. He was young and attractive and the whole world sought him, and yet he found time to entertain me when I must have been a nuisance to everybody. I was terribly morbid, and even my sense of humour had left me. He would sing and play for me and try to make me laugh.

I hate to speak of my illness except to prove that there is nothing that cannot be overcome. I was soon an invalid, unable to walk alone, and my friends gathered round me in great anxiety.

I could not bear to see or speak to strangers, and one day a friend brought in a young American. I was very annoyed and hated to be seen by anybody I did not know intimately. However, he was charming, and in the course of talk he spoke of Switzerland and of a nursing home on the hill above Montreux.

He described the Lake of Geneva and how the little steamers hurried about all day long, playing tinkling little tunes. He told me of the sun and the wild flowers and the great vineyards of grapes, and created the most imaginative picture in my mind.

I couldn't remember anything or anybody in those days—they seemed to float past me in a mist—but that picture of Switzerland I never forgot.

Then I got desperately ill, and it was a question of life or death. They tried to take me to a hospital, but I



refused to go, and all the time I kept begging to go to Switzerland to that home on the hill.

The doctors absolutely forbade it, but I defied every one and decided I would go if I died on the way.

My doctor was so anxious that he washed his hands of my whole case and said he would not be responsible.

But I held to my purpose. I was strangely lonely without Julian and my mother, and I had no one to take me on that last journey.

I felt I should die there, but I wanted to hear the little tinkling boats and feel the sun before I had to go.

Three days before I was crossing, Suzanne Ainley came in to see me.

It wasn't a planned visit, and it was by chance that I felt well enough to see anybody.

We talked of my pilgrimage and, finding I was going alone, she threw over everything and insisted on taking me. What a wonderful friend she proved to be! Without her, I know I couldn't have survived the journey.

I was carried on to the ship and into the train, and I truly think she saved my life.

How can we legislate happiness? We never know when it is coming!

That month in Switzerland with Suzanne, when I thought I was dying, was almost the happiest time in my life. I was half blind, and so thin that she would carry me in her arms like a child.

Every afternoon she would put me in a little fiacre, and we would tinkle up the hills with our fat white pony shaking his bells in the sparkling lemon-coloured sunshine, with red tomatoes hanging over the walls and wild flowers everywhere, and the crisp invigorating air, with the smell of snow, blowing in our faces.

And Suzanne would stop the carriage and fill my lap with multi-coloured wild flowers, and amuse me and make me laugh and tell me tales of the theatre.

I hadn't laughed for so long, and she taught me the way again. She had a brilliant mind, and was an en-

trancing companion. But she was practical too, and a wonderful nurse. So good was she that they tried in every way to persuade her to continue and stay permanently in the nursing home as a head of one of the departments.

It is extraordinary, the amazing kindness human beings can show each other in disaster.

I have never understood why Suzanne did it. We had been good friends, but never great friends, in the past. It was a tremendous task. She sat up with me night after night, alert for my slightest need. Such a debt of friendship could never be repaid.

And I found peace at last, the greatest peace I have ever known in those months that I thought were the last.

I, who had a horror of death, know now there is nothing to fear.

I got worse and worse in spite of all the care. When all hope was over, Clara Butt came from England to say good-bye. By this time all my money had gone, and that added to my illness. I can see Clara now, leaning over the end of my bed; her warm, kind smile as she said that my friends in England had sent me a Christmas present, and she told me that she had placed to my credit in the bank the sum of £600.

The relief was tremendous and I rallied for a little while, but the doctors held out no hope.

The Countess of Dudley—I always think of her as Gertie Millar—and other friends came to see me for the last time. I was quite resigned and happy.

Then Fate intervened again. There was a conference in Lausanne, and Mussolini and Mr. Balfour and several great people were meeting there from all over the world.

A doctor from my nursing home went over to see the sights. In the evening he dined with several other doctors, and casually, in the course of conversation, he told them of my case, and how sad it was that, in spite of all the medical aid and love and friendship, I was beyond saving.

A little man who had been sitting quietly listening said that he thought perhaps he could cure me if they would send me to Strasbourg.

My doctor told him I dare not be moved from my bed, I could not possibly survive the journey; but so earnest was he that they agreed to put the proposition to me, as nobody could afford to take the responsibility of denying me even a remote chance to live.

Suzanne Ainley had gone back to England some months before, and I was quite alone in Switzerland. As Christmas drew near the thought of me was constantly in her mind. She knew Christmas was full of the saddest memories for me, and so she threw everything over, to my great thankfulness, and came back to spend it with me. She arrived just in time for the conference about my going to Strasbourg. It took place in my bedroom—in German. I didn't understand a word. I was too ill to care much one way or another, but one word stood out constantly in their talk—the word "*Tod.*"

Suzanne, with her usual decision, said it was worth the risk, and I was willing to do whatever she suggested. But the doctor was very sceptical, and she took a great responsibility on her own shoulders.

I suppose if I had died she would have been blamed.

She hired a special train and, with two nurses, took me to Strasbourg, and I was carried into the hospital on a stretcher. By this time I was nearly blind and only weighed six stone, and I hadn't walked for eight months. I was so ill with the jolting of the train and so exhausted that they couldn't wait to undress me before my treatment began. They gave me my first injection immediately and rushed to the laboratory with a test of my blood.

It is funny that, when one is on the borderland, how everything is peculiarly acute.

I was conscious of a white dimness at the end of my bed. I had not smiled for months.

The drives up the hills in the little fiacre had been given up long ago, and I hadn't laughed since. I was too

weak to lift a hand and I developed a curious morbid hatred of everybody—one of the symptoms of my illness.

Two hours after I was in the hospital they gave me a second injection.

It was terribly painful, but in an hour my sight came faintly back, and I smiled at the white shadow at the end of the bed that gradually began to take the form of a man, and presently I could discern a little dark face with two piercing black eyes and fierce upstanding black hair. The eyes looked at me intently. I smiled, and the man at the end of the bed mopped his brow. Then they took another test of my blood. The figure was still immovable, and watched me for hours.

By this time my sight was almost clear, but I hardly realized that the person whose eyes were piercing into mine was my saviour—Professor Blum.

After an hour another white-clad figure almost ran into the room. It was Professor Blum's assistant, who had been working in the laboratory.

They were so excited that they embraced each other. They spoke in English, and I heard them say, "My God, she's saved! It is the greatest discovery since Pasteur."

I was the first person to be treated in Europe with insulin, as the discovery was not yet known in Paris or England, only in Strasbourg.

How like a pattern does Fate weave her threads!

That stray conversation with an unknown American was the reason I ever came to Switzerland, and if I had not come there I would never have heard of Strasbourg or Professor Blum.

I am sure we don't follow our instincts enough in life.

The reason of my cure was remarkable too. My doctor's wife, whom he adored, had died a year or two before of my illness. All his love and devotion and brilliant medical knowledge could not save her, and when she died he had vowed to devote himself to finding the cure, as a memorial to her.

Therefore, the minute Dr. Banting's discovery was

announced in Canada, Professor Blum threw everything aside and went to him, and within a fortnight of his arrival he had telegraphed back and the experiments were being carried on in his laboratories in Strasbourg.

So the keynote of life, the incentive for all energy, power and success is—love.

If he hadn't been so broken-hearted at the death of his beloved wife, perhaps he would not have had the energy to find the cure and save the lives of hundreds of people. And I should not have been here to write this story.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

I SUFFERED more in my convalescence than in all the months before.

As life came back I began to struggle and to desire. Before, there had only been—peace. I had forgotten the storms; there was only a gentle drifting towards an ultimate haven—a haven peopled with my beloved ones, who were nearer to me than they had ever been on earth. I used to think I talked to them all day long, and they were not stiff ghost figures, but intimate, as they had been in life.

Nursing in the hospital was voluntary, and we were taken care of by nuns. As a sort of penance, they gave their services freely and worked very hard. They didn't know much about nursing, but love of humanity supplied the deficiency. They were very silent and awe-inspiring in their white wimples and black dresses, and they couldn't speak a word of English, only German and French.

My room was very austere; just plain whitewash and a crucifix on the wall, with the Christ in agony. I never could understand why they made us gaze on that figure of torture all day long. I longed for the Madonna holding her little Son—the effigy of the tenderness of love—instead of that tragic figure of pain.

I never knew how those dear nuns existed. They were up to Mass at five o'clock in the morning and nursed the patients in the hospital all day long; but they seemed to thrive on their devotion and sacrifice.

Then came lonely weeks of convalescence, when I slowly grew back to life. I felt like a traveller returned from a strange and unexplored country.



Out through the great gates of the hospital I would go—very slowly—stopping every few yards and, if nobody was looking, leaning against the wall from weakness. But, however great the strain, I had to get outside those iron gates, out into the town and feel the contact of living people.

It was freedom.

Like leaving behind the City of the Dead.

I would struggle along, almost fainting, but the minute the gates closed behind me my strength came back. I would totter over the bridge, very slowly, leaning on my stick and pausing to watch the peasants washing their linen in the river. They seemed so happy, singing and chattering and calling to each other. How I envied them! Up the main street, full of gaily-decked shops, into the little town of Strasbourg I would go—that friendly little town, so full of great achievement. It had magic for me. I suppose because it was there I was born again.

So much has happened in Strasbourg.

There is the Place Guttenberg, where the first printing press was made.

I would look up at the window of the room where Rouget de Lisle composed the "Marseillaise"; pass the little house with a plaque on it where Pasteur lived; or sit under the beautiful trees in the orangery and think of the proud ladies of the past who walked there.

It is wonderful to stand before the great clock in the cathedral, for as each hour strikes the Saints and Time and Life and Death pass across its face in a procession.

It gives one food for thought; a tremendous feeling of solemnity.

Best of all was sitting in the twilight in the cathedral with a candle burning before a dim altar.

There was a little community of nuns too in Strasbourg, who wore long blue dresses with trains and never left their cloister or their garden. They gave services, but their faces were veiled from the world, and they sat all day under the trees in their cloistered garden, embroidering

and making lace for the great altars. They exuded peace, and as one sat and listened to the soft droning of their voices earthly ills seemed to fade.

It was amazing to think that group of women could exist in the world as it is to-day.

Then there was the *pâté de foie gras* shops and the sausage shops, festooned with different coloured food.

There has never been so much food in any town in the world before, I should think.

Every other shop was either filled with cakes or sweets or sausages, and the people looked as if they ate them all.

Then there were gay days when the people dressed in their native costume and paraded about the town; and there were wonderful drives in the woods; up through the forest to the top of a hill overlooking the country for miles around.

Perched up there was another community of nuns more friendly than the nuns at the hospital.

They took in stray visitors and made a little money for their church that way. They were cheerful, quiet women, and it was glorious to sit up there on the terrace overlooking the world in the warm sunshine and eat huge plates of ham, and bread, and honey, and drink steaming delicious coffee from coarse white cups.

From then on I rallied, and there were five months of convalescence, and with the return of life pain and turmoil began.

It was a great experience, my illness, and, strange as it seems, one I would not have missed.

Before that I had feared the trivial things of life. Now they have no meaning for me—pride or personal vanity, world success, or money. I know how valueless they are.

I had been a wayward person and valued material things too highly before.

It is such a relief not to be afraid; and, again, as Fate is a woman, she is much kinder to those she cannot intimidate.

My doctor who gave me back my health did not know

that I was destined for a life so completely varied, so contradictory, so like a kaleidoscope.

He used to sit by my bed and try to break the news that I should never act again, and that, under no circumstances, must I have anything to do with the theatre; that I should be an invalid more or less all my life.

I would listen to him and smile, for I knew, in my heart, that if I had life at all I should give it to the theatre, and that as long as I lived my allegiance would be to the stage.

He might as well have asked me to jump over the moon as to ask me to give it up.

Since my recovery I have written plays, produced them, acted continually, and had great success in the theatre.

I have been much more active and much stronger than ever before in my life.

So there is nothing that cannot be overcome.

Just as millions of us have a nose, eyes and a mouth, yet every face is different, so every Fate is different—the unexpected is always round the corner.

That thought helped me to recover and upset everybody's calculations.

I came back to England after eighteen months, and for a long time had no desire to act. I loved the theatre just as dearly, but I was fettered by the thoughts of illness and the talks of illness that had surrounded me. I could not break myself of the habit of illness. I imagined myself incapable of facing the public.

I stayed with Maxine Elliott in her lovely home in the country, and was content to do nothing. She saw the way I was drifting, and roused me. Somerset Maugham and his wife were guests of hers, and the question of the London production of "Our Betters" was being discussed. Mr. Maugham had asked me to play in it before, on the original production; but I refused, and I felt less inclined than ever now. I did not feel frivolous or capable of acting cynical comedy.

My sense of humour had had a dreadful set-back in those two ghastly years.

Dear Maxine Elliott, the wisest and truest of friends, insisted that I should go to work and at least try, and assured me that if I didn't take myself in hand I should develop into a chronic invalid and retire to bed for the rest of my life.

She pulled me back to reality and made me see myself from the outside and started me off again, although at the time I thought this a very cruel attitude. I felt myself a martyr, but resigned myself to her better judgment.

The first two or three rehearsals were agony to me. I could not face the company without bursting into tears, for no reason, my nerves were so weak. But gradually I got to adore the marvellous part Mr. Maugham had given me. He was kindness itself, and sat patiently at all the rehearsals and let me work out my own conception without interference!

He is the leading dramatist of the English theatre, and the least exacting and most sympathetic author to actors it is possible to imagine.

Therefore he gets the best out of them, and most of us make great successes in his plays.

The first night of "Our Betters" was amazing.

The public that had loved me for years, who knew all about my illness and the miracle of my resurrection from the papers, welcomed me with their whole hearts.

It was a tragic welcome, as to a personal friend they thought never to see again.

Then my part began, and I turned from a tragedy queen into a comedienne before their eyes.

The play was a triumph for everybody concerned, and we ran through two summers.

The keynote of my success in "Our Betters"—my voice—was another curious coincidence.

I went to lunch with a friend of mine, a very rich woman who does nothing, and does not enjoy herself very much in consequence.

She gives innumerable parties and invites all the theatrical celebrities, and people in society and foreign notables, she can gather together. This particular day she was giving a luncheon to some women friends.

I sat between two strangers and was not very interested, as they were asking me all sorts of silly questions about the theatre and talking as if an actor's life was all glamour and quick returns.

Suddenly a voice struck on my ears. The owner of it was seated a little way up the table. I was so fascinated that I forgot all about my neighbours.

The voice was so remarkable that I thought it must be an affectation.

After luncheon I asked my hostess why her friend kept it up so long, as it seemed rather an elaborate joke. She laughed and assured me it was quite natural.

It was so amusing and attractive that I begged to be asked to meet the owner of it. So we lunched together two or three times, and I imitated the voice in "Our Betters."

On the first night you could hear the name of the original in loud whispers all over the stalls.

Everybody recognized it, and it made my part very successful.

During the run of the play I wrote "The Rat" with Ivor Novello, and produced it with him.

We used to write the play anywhere—on tablecloths! on envelopes! on bits of paper! And we would sit up writing far into the night, drinking innumerable cups of tea.

We had an original way of collaboration.

We would write the same scene and read it to each other, and speak our minds about each other's work very frankly indeed, but we did not quarrel, although some of the home truths we told each other were very hard to bear.

None of our friends believed we were seriously writing and meant to produce a play.



They thought we were mad to undertake such an enterprise. They met our earnest intention with laughter, and nothing is so hard to combat in life as ridicule.

But I suppose opposition is a great thing if you have the character to stand against it.

As our friends took us separately aside and warned us of our folly, we grew more and more determined to proceed.

The only bit of real sympathy we received throughout the undertaking was from Noel Coward, and he was immensely helpful at the two final bewildering rehearsals.

We were tired out, and we needed help and encouragement so badly—and he supplied it at exactly the right moment.

Ivor, despite the huge fortune he had made out of music and songs, was going through the usual crises in an artist's life and, after he had paid all the production expenses and salaries, etc., was £80 overdrawn at the bank.

All the money I had earned had gone on my illness, so I only had the salary I was earning at that time.

But we were undaunted in spite of opposition, or perhaps because of it.

We produced the play at Brighton. I was playing then at the Globe Theatre. They could not spare me from the play even for one night, as my part was so important and it would have thrown the whole cast out of gear, so after an all day and night final dress rehearsal I caught the five o'clock train and left my partner, with his face very white and ashen, to face the crisis alone.

How I got through my performance I do not know, but eventually I found myself in the midnight train going back to Brighton. Many important people had travelled down from London to see the play.

Ivor's chauffeur met me outside the station on that dark and muddy night. He had been with Mr. Novello for years and was devoted to him, and he always regarded all of Ivor's successes as his own.



I knew I should get the first reaction from him.

His face was very solemn as I stumbled into the car and said, "What news?"

He replied solemnly: "I'm afraid, madam——" There was an agonizing pause—I nearly fainted with suspense. Then he continued, "We have an overwhelming success."

"The Rat" ran for a year in London, and Ivor made a world-wide reputation with the play and the picture. After the year in London there followed a triumphant tour, breaking records everywhere.

The crowds outside the theatre were amazing. They had to have police every night to steer Mr. Novello to his car and prevent his adorers from breaking down the door and getting run over in their eagerness to secure his autograph.

There is nothing so thrilling as the adulation of the public for an artist they love.

Ivor Novello has the best capacity for work of almost anybody I know in the theatre. His energy is untiring, and all this success did not turn his head in the very least.

The only effect it had was to make him work harder than ever. He tried to improve his acting, slogged away at his plays, took pictures all day long, wrote music every spare second he had, and never grumbled or complained.

Somebody has said that success is three-thirds capacity for work.

Most people rest on their laurels.

Not so Ivor.

After that we acted together in "The Firebrand" in London, but that did not succeed very well; and then we wrote another play, "Down Hill," which made a great deal of money. But I always had an affection for "The Rat." I suppose because we suffered so over it.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

**I**N 1924 John Barrymore came over to England. He had made a triumph in America in "Hamlet," and he wanted to play it in London. But difficulties arose about the theatre. There are so very few in England, and the first-class ones are invariably booked up months ahead.

In America you can get a theatre overnight. He was very impatient at the delay, and the managers who had heard of his great reputation were a little bewildered at his American voice when he discussed plans with them.

So many of them feared the English public would not accept him in Shakespeare.

But John Barrymore has genius.

His voice and manner and attitude and every attribute about him change with the part he assumes.

After great difficulty he secured the Haymarket Theatre, and Fay Compton (an exquisite Ophelia) and I were in the cast with him.

He was surrounded by an English company who had spoken blank verse all their lives.

To anybody else this would have been a handicap, but John Barrymore's voice surpassed them all, exquisitely gentle and colourful, full of power and music.

He made a magnificent Hamlet.

The change was so amazing that it even bewildered me, who knew him so well in real life.

Although the pictures have gained a great star, what a tremendous loss he is to the theatre! One longed to see his Richard II and Macbeth.

I loved being in "Hamlet," playing a tragic rôle again, although the first night was an ordeal indeed.

The public were used to me in the part of the Duchess in "Our Betters," and if a note of my voice or a gesture of my hands or a turn of my head had recalled that part to them, it would have been fatal to the whole production. But my training at His Majesty's stood me in good stead, and nobody recognized the petulant, childish Duchess in the tragic figure of Gertrude Queen of Denmark.

It seemed, however, in spite of my success in "Hamlet," I was not allowed to be a tragedienne any more, and the next part I played was in "Meet the Wife," a light-hearted, charming comedy.

I think people like me in comedy because, although I have the keenest observation of people, silly and wise, conceited and modest, I can find something in them that is human.

I have always tried to keep spitefulness out of my representations.

All of us have our lives to live, and, however we express ourselves, we have the same lonely course to run from the cradle to the grave.

Therefore I can never laugh cruelly at the follies and idiosyncrasies of humanity.

I can only find tenderness in my heart for everybody, and the greater their faults the more human they are.

The perfect people can take care of themselves.

It would be an entirely different world, I suppose, if we chose our friends for their characters and virtues, and ignored their charms, but if we should analyse our feelings, it is their very faults we love best—that endear them to us. But, alas, there is the missionary spirit in all of us, and we try to improve and altered our loved ones instead of realizing that the very eccentricities were the first things that attracted us.

I think because I realized these things that my comedy is not hurtful, and that is why, I suppose, they have turned me into a comedienne.

After all I do not think there is nearly as much tragedy in life as there is humour.

Shakespeare's line illuminates it: "There's nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so."

Just as I was settling down into a comfortable rut and thinking I should go on playing comedy parts in London until I was an old lady, my Harlequin tapped me on the shoulder once more.

One night, at a party at Ivor Novello's house, I met Guthrie McClintic and his brilliant wife, Katherine Cornell.

By chance, I sat by Mr. McClintic in the crowd of people. We became great friends at once, and we talked about America.

I told him how happy I had been there, but that I should never go back.

I thought so at that time, but nothing is certain in this most uncertain world. My life couldn't be a settled one; it is not my destiny.

Mr. McClintic cabled for me in a few months, and I was on the ocean again.

In the years I had been in England dear Edward Sheldon had become very ill. The first night I landed in New York I went to dine with him. I stood outside his door, trembling a little at the change I thought I should find. I did not want him to notice the slightest tremor. He called to me, and with the sound of his deep, vital voice my fears dropped from me like a cloak. I had my dinner sitting happily beside him, and on the table was a replica of the little Victorian bouquet, with the very same coloured flowers, that I had carried on the last night of "Peter Ibbetson." We had the gayest evening imaginable, talking over the intervening years. It was exactly as if we had parted a few hours before.

How magical! Both of us had glimpsed those unknown shores and turned back to face life—he, more vital, more brilliant than ever before.

He is the counsellor of all who know him.

His interest and sympathy in the smallest detail of our lives is unfailing. So generous and giving is his spirit that we accept without consideration and take it as our right.

If anybody wants help on a play, he writes in a scene for them.

If a manager wants advice, Ned will give his judgment.

If an actor wants work, a word from him is more helpful than a recommendation from the President.

Every great artist finds his way to that room. Kreisler and Elman and Moiseiwitch regard it as a privilege to go and play to him.

The great authors and painters seek an hour with him. His mind is so full of pictures that he can describe in detail some little street in a continental town, or a wayside garden, or the details in the Sargent frescoes in the Boston Museum.

Nothing he has ever seen or heard or gathered in his fragrant mind is lost.

And we who love him most know no privilege in the world like spending an evening with him.

As you enter that room it is as if you were within the innermost temple of reality and truth.

False thoughts and vanities shrink to their true value.

We are all better for being with him, and we face the world again with a little more courage, a little more simplicity, a great deal more belief and knowledge of the faith that passeth all understanding.

I had not been in New York for nine years. The change was miraculous! A different city. It was half as tall again, and so high were the buildings that they had to put a limit on them as the streets were becoming ice-cold, like the crevices in great mountains, and the sun was being blotted out! How magnificent the buildings are!

The young architects vie with each other, and there is plenty of wealth to give them their chance—and competition makes for perfection. But the amazing thing of all



was my little obscure Algonquin Hotel. For, when I entered, it was like the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty. Nothing had changed for me. The bell boys were just the same age, the clerks were just the same, the telephone girls remembered and greeted me. It was as if they had slept for nine years and awakened to my entrance and took up the thread again exactly as if I had left them the day before.

I felt as if I had come back home.

But how different it is now! People fight for tables and are kept back by ropes. All the celebrities of New York commingle in the lobby. It is twice as large again and is the centre of the intelligentsia of America. From the east, from the north, from the south, from the west they come—if only to have a meal.

The Bay of Naples is still painted on the back-room walls, rather faded now, and very few people sit in the old dining-room, but I go in occasionally just for friendliness.

In the Pink Room, which did not exist in my time, is the famous Round Table, renowned all over the world, where the literary and dramatic critics forgather. At this table you will find frequently Alexander Woollcott, whom I am proud to count among my best friends, Harold Ross of the "New Yorker," Charles Brackett, George Kaufman, Marc Connelly, Konrad Bercovici, Carl Van Vechten, Ben Hecht and dozens of others; and if you are invited to sit at the famous table you are surrounded by the cream of the *literati* of New York.

That dining-room is the Mecca of international moving-picture stars, actors, actresses, painters and musicians, and it is all owing to the personality of Frank Case, who is just as kind and considerate and friendly as of old, who now owns the hotel and, it is whispered, is a millionaire!

I went to Washington, and was taken, in the twilight, to see Lincoln's tomb. It was not there when I last visited Washington.

The white simplicity of it is awe-inspiring as it stands



there reflected in the lake that fronts it. It is so exquisite that the tears poured down my face as I looked.

It is as if the very soul and spirit of Lincoln rested there—at peace at last!

There is nothing more beautiful in the whole of Europe. The theatre too has changed utterly.

When I first went to America the plays were imported from France and Germany and England, but now the American stage has its own drama, and is translated and produced in all languages and in every country.

The play, "John," in which I appeared in New York, did not succeed, although it was very beautiful and is one of my best memories of the theatre.

All the time I was longing to have "Our Betters" produced, but the commercial managers told me that a revival would fail in New York.

However, I believed in it, as did Messmore Kendall.

The play had been produced in America before the war, but it was much better understood by the post-war public.

In the original production they had played it brilliantly but more seriously.

In London we acted it for frank comedy.

I think many plays could be reproduced from an entirely different angle.

So much depends on the point of view of the producer.

Plays that fail when treated seriously, if produced from the comedy angle, might prove great successes, or vice versa.

It would be an interesting experiment.

I was preparing to come home when the unexpected happened and everything cleared for the production of "Our Betters." Ina Claire, the most-sought-after actress in America, suddenly found herself with nothing to do, and was persuaded to play. Her performance was brilliant. The American public loved the play and it proved a triumphant success.

It was the first comedy part I ever played in America.

During that run I met Jed Harris, who is 29 and stands

among the foremost producers in America, and who, in spite of himself, is a millionaire.

But he has the same simple adoration of the theatre that I remember so well in all who have been enslaved by it.

It is like a song sung over again to hear him talk.

For every new person who ventures within its realms it is like first love.

They never imagine that anybody else has adored it in quite the same way.

The everlasting charm of the theatre ! Its true lovers—whether they succeed or fail—are ever at heart glorious gipsies.

It doesn't matter whether we act or produce our plays in a tent or the most magnificent edifice ever built.

It's always the theatre—our beloved Temple of Make-Believe—and we wouldn't give it up for all the security that life can bestow.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE whole blame for these memories rests with Noel Coward, because he made me write them.

This is how it came about.

Ivor Novello had started a night club, called the Fifty-Fifty.

There was a very kindly thought behind the enterprise, and it supplied a much felt need.

The members of the theatrical profession who earned small salaries had nowhere to go after the play at night to have supper and a little entertainment at a moderate price.

The big dancing clubs were prohibitive. So Mr. Novello thought of this idea to help the younger actors, but his popularity was such that the Fifty-Fifty became the rendezvous of all the smartest people in London, and the members for whom it was originally started were almost crowded out.

When they had finished acting and taken their make-up off, the club was so full they could hardly get a table.

It was charming and gay, decorated by Nerman, with caricatures of all the leading actors in London. They had a very good orchestra and, with delicious eggs and bacon and coffee, you could have as delightful an evening as anywhere in London.

If you were rich enough, you could even have a bottle of wine.

And we had magnificent entertainments.

Sometimes Ivor would conduct or play, or any of the artists who happened to be there would get up and sing, or entertain, or act.

These performances were spontaneous, and some evenings were quite brilliant.

But the place could not make profits, because some of the original members were very poor.

One there was who would have his kipper and listen to the music and then go elsewhere to have his cup of coffee, because he could get it for a penny cheaper. But the club was the whole pleasure of his drab life and the only diversion he could look forward to.

So, you see, it was not started as a commercial enterprise.

But success is so wayward.

There was a time in the history of the Fifty-Fifty when you could have charged any price you liked for a table.

I suppose people first of all went to see the celebrities, and then continued because they enjoyed themselves.

Very often we would have a very great personage indeed in our midst, and there would hardly be any room for him; the tables would have to be cleared to find room for his party. But he loves the theatre and likes to be in its care-free environment.

It is a relaxation from his strenuous duties.

Ivor Novello liked his friends to go there often, and we were all so fond of him that we went night after night, although we got very tired of it and longed for supper in our own homes and cosy talks round a blazing fire rather than having to shout down an orchestra.

After a time we could not keep up this semblance of the gay life, and, as the celebrities began to fade away, the interest in the club died down.

But at the height of its popularity Ivor had a special alcove set aside, with two long tables, for the guests he particularly invited.

Night after night, sitting in a corner, Noel Coward would ask me to tell him stories of the theatre, a subject of which he never seemed to tire, although he had acted since he was a child; but it is a topic of everlasting enchantment to people who really belong.



*Photograph by Sasha, 7 Suffolk St., S.W. 1*

MY FAMILY





It was Noel who persuaded me to write down the little things I remember.

He had not come into his own in those days, although we all knew what genius he possessed.

He was chafing at restraint and longing for the success that we all eventually felt would be his.

He was just as brilliant and witty then, but, I think, being subconsciously conscious that he had a much better brain and was superior intellectually to many of his contemporaries made him a little bitter.

But success has had the contrary effect on him than on most people.

He is much softer in his outlook now and is the kindest and most sympathetic friend.

He had already produced and acted in a revue, and had had some success, but he burst upon the world in all his glory in "The Vortex."

I think the story of its production is quite touching.

A fellow-writer who was not much older than himself, but who had met with a little more recognition, was the one who financed his first venture.

Not a manager, whose business it is to find playwrights, but a fellow-writer who was also making his way!

The play was produced at the Everyman Theatre on a very little capital, and was an overwhelming success. It is amazing how often the great theatre magnates miss their chance.

Noel came to my dressing-room at the Globe after the play was over, his face strained and white, and in his eyes the vision of the future.

He and I and a very dear mutual friend drank to success. We did not realize how overwhelming it would be.

Nothing could have stopped him of course, but he owes a lot to that first "backer."

The world has changed so much since the war—everybody's point of view, everybody's outlook—that I some-

times think my pre-war days were a book that I had read, a romance I remember.

But the life of the theatre, underneath, is exactly the same, just as exciting, eventful, ever-renewing, only they express themselves differently these days.

It is like the spring leaves that burst from the gnarled winter tree ; each year may seem different, but the same life-blood flows through young and old.

The danger with so many of us is to get stuck in our own period.

People say to me sometimes that they cannot understand how I can accept the modern point of view. It is because I have the sincerest feeling and affection and tenderness for my friends of to-day.

I suppose I shall always be a bit sentimental, and that is the only old-fashioned thing about me.

I am never bored with life, because the present is for ever interesting, and the reason I succeed in expressing the modern point of view on the stage is that I have sympathy with it.

There was a good deal more formality before the war, but I do not think there was any more morality or kindness of spirit.

The fashions were different, but human nature is ever the same. We alter the shape of our frocks and our hats, and the style of our hair—that is all.

The theatre fashion has changed too, but still it is the same theatre.

I think it has lost a deal of its grandeur, but it has gained in introspection and is more intimate and real !

The fashion in actresses has changed !

Beautiful, deep-bosomed women are a thing of the past, but, instead, lovely nymphs as slender as boys take their place. Perhaps their personalities make them unsuitable for the great classic rôles, but they play comedy and pathos better and have a lighter touch.

There is none of the languid grace or the warm beauty of 1900.

There are no contralto people any more.

The world is full of sopranos—almost falsettos; the stately majesty of the tragedy queen has gone by, but her place is taken by lovely nymphs.

The world is ever young, and Youth is not entirely confined to years.

There is an old saying, "Those whom the gods love die young." That does not mean they die early. It means that they remain young in the world, even if they live to be eighty, and are willing to accept life in all its phases.

What a wonderful age I have lived in! I have stood in History!

When I used to lie on my mother's dressing-table, wrapped up in my blanket, among the grease-paints, there were no motor-cars, or flying machines, or gramophones, or telephones, or wireless. My life has been so thrilling—so full of new discoveries.

It must be dull for the babies who are born to-day. Surely there is nothing left to find out. They know everything!

How happy I feel! I am on a great ship, on my way to England. I have been writing in my cabin, trying to concentrate.

I have made voluminous notes, but the sparkling sea calls me.

It is one of those days when the sea looks very young, and the mischievous wind has whisked away my papers. I can see them bobbing up and down on the curling green waves.

I cannot catch them—all the splendid and profound things I wanted to say in farewell! Instead, dear ghosts crowd round me, trying to step into the pages. Their faces seem to say, "Don't you remember? I loved you, and you loved me." Of course I remember! Can I ever forget? But then I should go on writing for ever. I give up. There are no words to say good-bye. I lie back, my

upturned face to the bluest of heavens, the warm breeze caressing me in little dabs and gusts.

Dozingly, I fancy I can hear the Lorelei's song, and my half-closed eyes search the horizon.

I, who have listened to the singing of the sirens all my life, and always shall, I suppose, until I die. To-day they are very real to me. How akin I feel to the sea.

It is the "figurehead" feeling of my very young days. It hasn't changed at all.

My heart is pressing forward against life—such as of old—the same sense of the unexpected event, the coming adventure!

My youth, my dreams, my ideals recaptured for a moment—then shattered—for the sake of an autograph!

There is murder in my heart as I turn and smilingly answer my fellow-passenger's polite questions. Am I fond of the theatre? How clever to remember my lines! Do I like making-up?

Where—oh, where—are the sea nymphs?

I look towards the horizon, where the sea and sky mingle, trying to recapture my vision.

There is nothing—only our good ship going slowly on its way.

I have been robbed of a dream!

I forget that to those about me I am a middle-aged woman, but very successful—an actress, whose autograph is a thing to possess.

How it surprises me when people treat me with diffidence and respect and behave as though I am an important person—I who, in my heart, still think of those elephants, although there is no one to buy them for now.

Shall I always, when my hair turns grey, be the same light-hearted, care-free girl who hopped over Waterloo Bridge? It is ridiculous!

I am very angry with the lady and the autograph book, but grateful that she thought me important enough to speak to, and I console myself by thinking they must have given me something—those sea sisters of mine—or

people would not seek me out and want to talk to me as they do now that I am no longer very young or very beautiful.

It is pleasant to be liked for one's self alone.

And, after all, it is strange how little I regret my beauty. It was a precious loan that I returned with gratitude, thankful for the joy it gave.

I feel I am one of the privileged ones, for Beauty is the highest gift of the gods—whether it be of soul or mind or body !

The storms are over, and the peaceful sun sets over the calm waters.

So here I am, on this smiling day, happy, content, successful.

How foolish to have worried over the difficulties and vicissitudes had I but known that, on this glorious day, I should be lying on a ship, under a clear, blue sky, looking towards England !

When I think of the stormy waters I have ploughed through, how can I say Life is not ever wonderful, for ever changing—a glorious Harlequinade ?





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